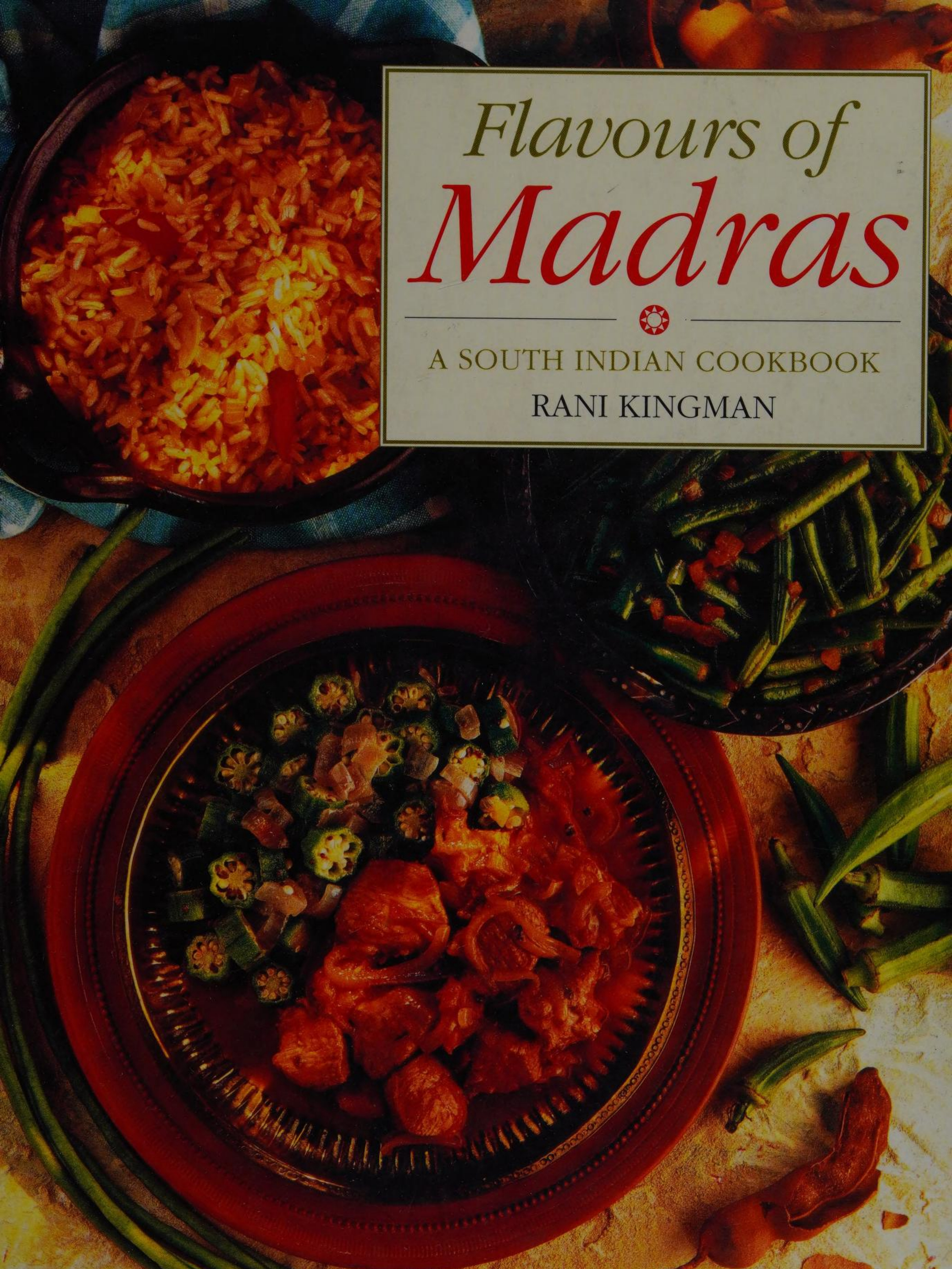
Flavours of
Madras

A SOUTH INDIAN COOKBOOK

RANI KINGMAN



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Flavours of Madras

A SOUTH INDIAN COOKBOOK

RANI KINGMAN

Rani Kingman has gathered together her favourite recipes from Madras, Tamil Nadu, where she grew up. They reflect the distinctive ingredients of this part of India – a land of coconut and tamarind, turmeric and chilli, washed by seas with a wealth of fish and seafood. The author shares with us recipes handed down through the generations – delicious food, as prepared and eaten at home. All enthusiasts of Indian food will want to cook it.

Though South India is often thought of as wholly vegetarian, this is not the case; as well as an extensive chapter on vegetable dishes, the book has chapters on fish and seafood, meat dishes, rice dishes, breads and pancakes, sauces, pickles and accompaniments, savoury snacks, sweets and desserts. There is also a detailed glossary and index.

Mrs Kingman not only presents the food of her homeland, but tells us something of its rich and ancient culture, of everyday life and legend.

Flavours of Madras is beautifully illustrated, with photographs of the recipes and of landscapes and ways of life in Tamil Nadu.

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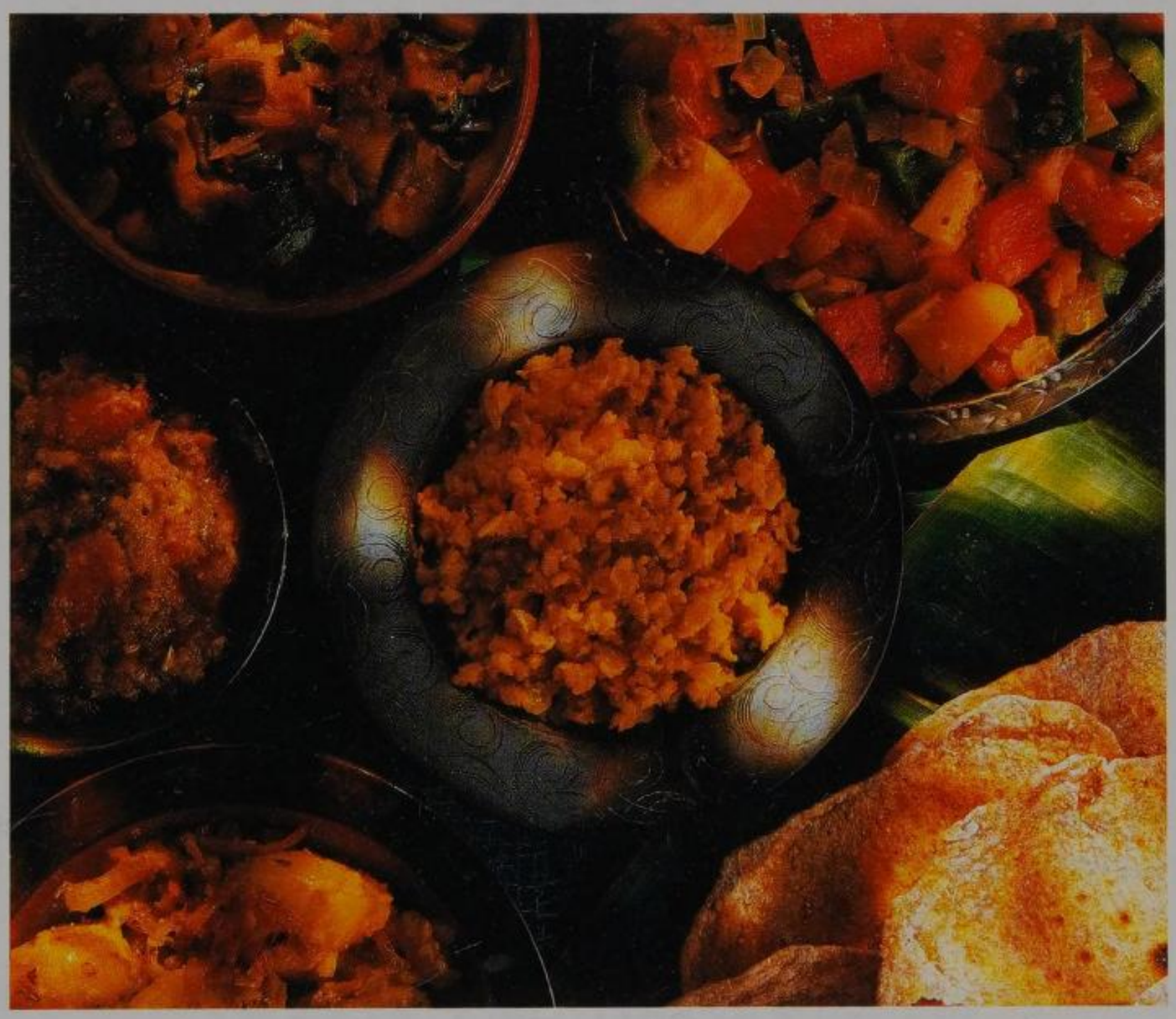

RANI KINGMAN

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Unestranged kinship breeds unabating wealth.

THE 'TIRRUKARAL'

To my mother Mrs Anne Rebecca Arumainayagam, née Rungaswamy
to my sons Billy and Raji Kingman
and to the memory of my grandmothers and mother-in-law: Mrs Ponnamal Arumainayagam, née Devanayagam; Mrs Charlotte Elizabeth Rungaswamy, née Vedanayagam;
Mrs Maud Elsie Kingman, née Harley.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Neither earth or heaven can truly repay spontaneous aid . . . help given regardless of return is wider than the sea.

The verses above, taken from the ancient poem the 'Tirrukaral' express my thanks to those who have made this book possible. My husband, Bob Kingman, gave me a lot of understanding, encouragement and help for which I am grateful. I would like to thank my mother who prepared and showed me all the tempting dishes and my father who inspired and encouraged me to write them down. To my grandmothers and aunts who passed on to me some of the old family recipes and allowed me to share them I owe my gratitude. Thank you Rachel, Carole, John, Maureen and David (my sisters, sister-in-law and brothers), Margery Harley, Geraldine and Tony Montalbano, who gave me a home to stay in on my visits to London and shared some of their ideas with me. Billy and Raji, my sons, my nephews Anthony and Jamie and niece Francesca tried whatever I prepared without too much complaint.

I had help with the typing of my manuscript from my friends Jane McKee, Pat Hirst, Elizabeth Bennett and Robin Bennett and I am grateful to them for their time and effort. Mary Gibson and Laura Gillespy were willing victims who have tried some of my dishes. Many thanks to Danny Brannigan for his photographs. To my other friends who listened and helped me in little ways, thank you.

I would like to thank Clarissa Dickson-Wright, who encouraged and helped me to find a publisher. My gratitude and thanks to my editors Jackie Jones and Eileen Cadman who gave me their expertise, hard work and support and got the best out of my manuscript. Last, but not least, I owe my gratitude to all those at Garnet for giving me a chance to share what I have learnt about Tamilian cuisine and culture.

Nandri. Thank you.

Preface

As a young girl growing up in Madras I learned many customs regarding food as I watched my mother at work in her kitchen. Later, I learned to cook as my grandmother, mother and my aunts all showed me their recipes and their techniques. Now I have written down the recipes passed down to me, so that my sons – who have grown up with the richness of two cultures – and others may learn the traditions of Madras.

For Tamilians, food is closely connected with many customs and beliefs, all of which formed an inherent part of my upbringing. So alongside my recipes I have tried to convey a little of the philosophy that underlies this cuisine, as well as the day-to-day practices associated with foods and cooking.

The kitchen in a Tamilian home, where the preparation and cooking begins, is considered pure and sacred. The cook, who has to wash thoroughly before she starts preparing the meals and may not be touched while cooking, is not permitted to taste any of the food during the course of preparation because it may become polluted. So Tamilian cooks learn to measure by sight, and to gauge the flavour from the cooking aromas. Consequently, in writing down my recipes, it has not always been easy to give precise quantities for this ingredient or that, nor precise cooking times – however, all the recipes have been carefully recorded and tested, with ingredients bought in England, and they taste just as they should.

I hope you enjoy learning about these beliefs and customs from Madras, which I am proud of, and that the flavours of Madras give your kitchen a Tamilian warmth and hospitality.

The first virtue in any creed is to share your food and cherish all life.

FROM THE 'TIRRUKARAL'

MADRAS

Madras lies along the Malabar and Coromandel coasts of South India, washed by three seas. I use the name as it was used in the past, meaning the state of Tamil Nadu, rather than the city alone. Madras is a land of surf, spice and magic, a land of temples with a profusion of orange flowers, shade of the banyan tree, the *minqu* drum, chime of the bell, the heady scents of incense and spices. Out in the Bay of Bengal lie the paradise archipelagoes of the Andaman and Nicobar islands, where the crystal-clear waters shimmer with tropical fish amongst the coral. Many Tamilians look to the sea for their livelihood: seafood, rich in variety, and plentiful, has given rise to a range of delicious seafood dishes. Inland, Madras is largely agricultural – its warm temperatures, fertile soil and rainfall permitting good crops. Coconut and tamarind are two of the crops that characterise the region's food. Rice is a staple (though it, and sugar, are rationed in order that sufficient quantities can be exported as cash-earners). Groundnuts, mustard and sesame are grown, and inland the more temperate hills are the home of tea and coffee plantations.

A BRIEF HISTORY

The sea has always been greatly important for the Tamilians, as a source of food and as a highway for voyages east and west. We know that as early as the 6th century BC ships from south-east India voyaged to the Malay peninsula and Burma in search of precious metals – and by the 1st century AD there was extensive traffic and trading across the Indian Ocean, acquiring spices and other goods from south-east Asia (traded in India and taken westwards to Europe by merchants from Greece and Rome).

Madurai (capital of the Pandyan kingdom) acquired great wealth as it was the crossroads of trading routes that brought all manner of items from every part of India to the south, where they were traded with merchants from Rome and elsewhere. Pepper, 'black gold', was grown on the Malabar and Coromandel coasts, and was used as a medium of trade. St Thomas the Apostle came to Kerala (to the west of Madras) in AD52, and is said to have been martyred near the present-day city of Madras around AD70, since when the Christian faith has survived in Madras. (At around the same time, a Jewish community was founded in Cochin – also in Kerala.) Close contact between India and south-east Asia persisted for over a thousand years – and around the 11th century the great Tamil empire of the Cholas dominated south-east Asia as well as a huge expanse of south India. The powerful Hindu empires prevented the south of India undergoing Muslim invasions on the scale of those in the north.

The next significant impact came from the British, initially via the East India Company – in fact, the land of

the city was leased by the Company and a trading port established (1640). The British sold Indian produce (silks and cottons, indigo dye and opium) to China, in exchange for China tea. The town of Pondicherry was a French trading post, and from time to time the French and British would fight out their European battles on Indian soil. In time, of course, Madras became part of the Raj, with its influences and legacy.

OF FOOD AND PHILOSOPHY IN MADRAS

Though the Tamilians have their own distinct history and characteristics, something all Indians have in common is the ancient custom of hospitality. Indian hospitality is teamed with excellent food and gracious service and has to be tried – for it is like no other in the world.

Food is traditionally served on platters with raised edges, called the *thal* for men and *thali* for the smaller version used by women. These trays were once made of brass, copper and silver, though now they are usually stainless steel. Individual dishes are then served in *katora* or *katori*, which keep the dishes separate so the individual can enjoy the aromas and flavours of each dish. The traditional serving vessels – of vivid enamelled metals, of porcelain or metals engraved and chased, of brass on steel, and gold on silver – were the focal point of display; they have now been replaced by stainless steel dishes wrapped in gaily coloured cloths of cotton and silk. When food is served the cloths are folded back loosely around the container.

To eat, people sit on woven mats, while the richer Tamilians sit on *jamakalams,* or cotton sheets of many colours that were hand-blocked in the old days. My English dinner table is laid with Indian cloths of brilliant red, lapis lazuli and magenta, for I love these strong colours.

Sweetmeats, symbols of welcome, love and hospitality, may be eaten at almost any time of the day, and are always offered to guests. Hospitality is important to Tamilians and to insult a host's hospitality – however unwittingly – is unforgivable. Guests should take a little of whatever is put before them, and if it is not to their taste the remainder may be left on the plate.

Savouries and sweets are inevitably linked together as are all things in Tamilians' lives, as they believe life to be a circle. We are born, we live and die, and are reborn. Foods that have warmth should always be coupled with those that have a quality of coolness – this tradition goes back two thousand years in our culture.

The daily life of the Hindu is affected by the elements of sky, air, water, fire and earth and the times of the day: dawn, morning, afternoon, evening, dusk and night. The elements play an important part in food: certain spices produce heat in the body, such as chilli and pepper. Limes and other citrus fruits are considered cooling. Certain meat is supposed to produce heat. Fish and vegetables are regarded as cooling, though crab and prawns are considered bad in excess. A cold food may also be thought to have warmth in it – strangely enough, ice is considered warming, as is *kulfi* (ice cream)! When I was a college student in Madras, I was discouraged from eating citrus fruits during the monsoon season as they were too cooling. The correct balance has to be achieved, and this is the responsibility of the cook.

Water, one of the elements in Hindu astrology, affects the life and diet of the Tamilian. Water symbolises

the blood and Indian philosophers consider it very important. A bath is important before the start of the day, and if there is a river nearby people will even take a dip to be cleansed. Seafood, living in the water, is eaten to keep a balance in the body at all times.

Many Tamilians' homes have wells in the back garden. Water in the well is used for cleaning, bathing and washing up. Water for cooking and drinking is collected from pumps and usually carried to the houses by women, in clay pots carried on their heads. Drinking water is boiled, then cooled and kept in clay pots, while water for cooking is kept in big stainless-steel and brass pots. They are all stored separately. Rose essence is mixed in water and sprinkled by young maidens over guests at weddings, as a blessing. Every three years, pilgrims who can, go to the Ganges to be blessed and cleaned in its holy waters. In August, celebrations are held to mark the birth of the god Ganesh, and culminate in small Ganesh models being thrown into the water. And Christians (the second largest group in Madras) are baptised in water by priests.

Purity is important to Tamilians, especially in connection with food, and we observe this in a number of ways: shoes may not be worn in the house, where people sit, eat and sleep on the floor; clothes worn outside, for whatever activity, are changed before eating; the right hand only is used for eating (after thorough washing); each plate is served individually and individual little bowls for extra fare are placed on the table; when Tamilians drink they lift the cup and drink from it without touching it with their lips; water in a stainless steel jug and a tumbler for the water are the only items on the table before the meal, for it is considered unhygienic for the food to be laid out as it may become contaminated; each family member has their own thali and tumbler, and it would be considered impure to share them with others; the plates used by guests may be used only once, so to avoid waste fresh banana leaves are used, clean and pure themselves.

VEGETARIANISM IN MADRAS

It is often thought that all south Indians are vegetarians, but this isn't so. Though strict Hindus (particularly the Brahmin caste) eat no meat or fish, most other Hindus do eat meat if they can afford it – though not beef, as the cow is considered sacred. Muslims in Madras, of course, eat no pork. Lamb is popular (though often very expensive nowadays) as is goat (especially kid) and chicken (in practice, both beef and pork are on sale in the city, and are easily available in the countryside where people keep their own animals). However, when meat is eaten it is generally in very small quantities: usually just one meat or fish dish is served along with three or four vegetable dishes, plus rice or bread. It is quite normal for everybody to eat vegetarian meals on some days, and there is a high level of understanding about the restrictions on other people's diets.

SPICES, AROMATICS AND COOKING TECHNIQUES

Tamilian cookery has a system of its own, albeit unwritten. The knowledge and skills have been handed down from mother to daughter by word of mouth and by practical example.

The right mixture and balance of flavours and textures is the essence of good Tamilian cooking. However,

flavour and taste have always been personal, so feel free to make slight changes in the quantity of spices and choice of meat, fish or vegetables in the recipes in this book. Bear in mind, however, that halving or doubling the quantity of ingredients could alter the consistency of the dishes.

Like other Indians, Tamilians use no curry powders – even the well known *garam masala* does not feature in Tamilian cooking. The main spices used are chilli, turmeric, coriander and cumin. Salt is the most important of all seasonings and Tamilians use the zesty pungent rock salt available in India, which is sometime just called 'rock'. Sugar, honey, and raisins are considered sweet seasonings in many dishes. Citrus juices, other juices and tamarind act as acidic seasonings. Fresh, delicate-flavoured coriander leaves, sweet *neem* leaves (with their intriguing aroma that hints of truffle) and mint – which needs no introduction – are a few of the herbs used in Tamilian dishes. Tamilians are leisure-loving people and in the hot afternoons things slow down – this is reflected in the long hours of marinating. Spices, giving sweet and sharp flavourings when combined with citrus juices or yogurt, help tenderise and aromatise food.

Onions, shallots, garlic, ginger and fresh chillies are known as aromatics. They are prominent in Tamilian cooking as they give flavour and body to the various dishes. Juices from the meat or vegetables, together with ground aromatics and spices, provide the thickening in Tamilian dishes. Sauces may vary in colour from light gold to dark gold and dark red, depending on how well the onions are browned and how much chilli powder and turmeric are used. The timing of seasoning is important, and salt is best added after the aromatics and meat are browned, as it will otherwise spoil the dry sauté.

Many dishes are cooked by a method of sautéing then steaming – vegetables are cut into small pieces and added to sautéed aromatics along with salt and very little water. They are then covered with a tightly fitting lid and cooked over a high heat, which is then reduced. The steam in the pan should be sufficient to cook the food. Other foods are deep fried – properly deep-fried food is crisp, light and truly clean in taste and appearance. Sometimes food is simply sautéed in ghee, a method especially good for thinnish fillets of best quality meat. Garnishing and decoration of food is kept simple: a sprinkling of freshly chopped green herbs or of nuts such as cashews or almonds suffices.

A NOTE ON MEASUREMENTS

Imperial and metric measurements for ingredients are given. Measurements by volume are based on standard measuring spoons and cups [e.g. 1 tbsp = 15 ml]. Metric measurements by volume are given for all liquids [e.g. 4 tbsp (60 ml) water], but for simplicity are not given for dry items such as spices [e.g. 2 tsp ground coriander]. Since ghee may be purchased in block or tub form, it is measured in spoons, followed by a metric weight [e.g. 1 tbsp = 15 g]. 1 tbsp ghee weighs 15 g or ½ oz.

A NOTE ON QUANTITIES

Most of these recipes serve four, assuming that about four dishes, plus rice or breads, are served.

RICE

The rich and fertile river plains of the Cauvery (in the centre of Tamil Nadu), the Ponnayar, Palan, Vargai and Coovum are extensively cultivated with many varieties of rice, and the goddess of the monsoon, Parvati, is highly venerated so that there will be a good rice harvest each year.

One of the most popular (and expensive) long-grain varieties is called *ponni*, used for a wide range of dishes. This is my favourite rice: it is named after the heroine of a Tamil myth, and Ponni is one of my names. (Ponni is used in Tamil Nadu rather than *patna*, which is not grown there, but in some recipes I have specified patna rice, as ponni is hard to obtain here.) Other more basic and commonly used varieties are 'black' (not the same as black grains of wild rice) and 'glutinous' rice, both of which are used for puddings. *Basmati* rice – the 'queen' of rices – is used only on very special occasions such as weddings and religious festivals, and is an extremely important and valuable commodity.

Tamil Nadu is self-sufficient in rice, partly because of the fertility of the soil, and long traditions of water conservation schemes and management, but partly thanks to government funding of water conservation and well management. In 1976, because rice was being removed from Tamil Nadu for sale in other states, police barriers were set up at the borders to stop the smuggling. It was causing shortages and encouraging black market sales, especially of the more valuable rices such as basmati.

Whereas people in northern India supplement rice with bread in the form of *chappatis* and *pooris*, rice is the main staple in the south and is eaten twice a day by the average family, usually with a sauce to make it more interesting. Among the favourite sauces are *sambar* (a deliciously spiced lentil and vegetable sauce, quite thin in texture), *rassam* or pepperwater (often drunk at the end of the meal), *Devanayagam puli kolomba* (a sauce of aubergine and tamarind, which goes extremely well with fried fish too) and simple yogurt (see the section on Chutneys for recipes).

Rice is used in both savoury and sweet dishes, and is combined with *ulandu* (flour made from black grams, *urad dhall*) to make breakfast dishes such as *idlis, dosais* and *appams* (see Breads and Pancakes). No religious festival is complete without rice. One of the most important of these is Pongal, a harvest festival celebrated in January – and one of the rice desserts in the Tiffin section is named after it.

Rice is considered too important for any of it to be wasted – any left-over rice is washed then dried in the sun. Later it is deep-fried and served as an accompaniment. The starchy cooking water is sometimes saved, then drunk when cool.

The very first cooking lesson a Tamil girl is given by her mother is how to boil the rice. This is seen as important because, when she marries, a Tamil husband appreciates and judges her skills as a cook from the first time she serves it. A frequent topic of conversation at a dinner party is how to cook rice well, and the pitfalls each person has fallen into before being able to cook basmati or patna or ponni correctly!

The electric rice cooker has been a time-saving gift to those modern Tamil women who go to work, but in the rural villages women still use the method passed down from their mothers – and although these methods may be simple, there is still an art to them.

Having first described the basic method, I then give some simple variations of it. You can use these versatile recipes at any time with any dish, according to preference. The ingredients for all of them are easily available and each has its own texture and distinctive character. Variety is the spice of life in Madras!

COOKING RICE

Since the basic art of cooking rice is so important, it is appropriate to begin this section with one of the most simple methods, taught to me by my mother. It requires no special effort and any reasonable pan may be used. (In India, rice cooked by this method is boiled in a small rounded pot, with a lid which has holes in it to drain the starch at the end of cooking. At home I use a saucepan with a heavy base – to prevent sticking or burning – with a lid with a special vent in it to drain any excess water.)

Rice and its cooking water should always be measured by volume, not weight – the proportions are important so it is essential to measure both rice and water in the same cup (or in fluid ounces or millilitres). Different types of rice will require slightly different cooking times, depending on their size and moisture content – experiment a little until you have it exactly right for your favourite rice.

Simple rice

SATHAM

2 cups (16 fl oz or 500 ml) water
1 cup (8 fl oz or 250 ml) long-grain white rice
salt to taste (½ tsp–1 tsp)

1. Bring the water to the boil in a heavy-based saucepan.

2. Meanwhile wash the rice thoroughly and leave to drain.

3. When water boils add the washed rice and salt to taste and cover the saucepan.

4. Lower the heat and cook the rice for 10 minutes – check to see whether it is cooked. If not, replace the lid and return to the heat for another 3–5 minutes, until cooked. If there is any remaining water drain it, give the saucepan a shake before putting it back over the heat for a few seconds. The rice is ready to serve.

VARIATIONS

Buttered rice

VENNAI SATHAM

2 cups (16 fl oz or 500 ml) water
1 cup (8 fl oz or 250 ml) long-grain white rice
salt to taste (½ tsp–1 tsp)
1 oz (30 g) melted butter or ghee

In this recipe, the butter or ghee adds a little richness and helps to separate the grains.

1. Prepare the rice as stated in the recipe for Simple Rice, above.

2. Add the butter or ghee just before the end of cooking. (This rice may be kept warm, covered, until required.)

Decorated rice

PONMUND SATHAM

2 cups (16 fl oz or 500 ml) water
1 cup (8 fl oz or 250 ml) long-grain white rice
salt to taste (½ tsp–1 tsp)
1 small onion
ghee
2 oz (55 g) raisins
fresh coriander leaves

In this variation, a little sweetness of flavour and colour is added by the use of onion and raisins.

1. Prepare the rice as stated in the recipe for Simple Rice, facing page.
2. Peel the onion and slice finely.
3. Melt 1 tsp (5 g) ghee in a heavy pan. Add the onion and fry gently until it is soft and golden brown.
4. Add the fried onion and the raisins to the rice 5 minutes before the end of cooking.
5. Serve garnished with fresh coriander leaves.

Rice with fresh lime

ELAMCHA SATHAM

2 cups (16 fl oz or 500 ml) water
1 cup (8 fl oz or 250 ml) long-grain white rice
salt to taste (½ tsp–1 tsp)
1 small onion
ghee
1 tsp black mustard seeds
2 tsp (10 ml) lime juice, freshly squeezed

The lime juice adds a slightly fruity and tart flavour to the rice, and makes it a good accompaniment to rich dishes, or to fish.

1. Prepare the rice as stated in the recipe for Simple Rice, facing page.
2. While the rice is cooking, peel the onion and slice finely. Melt 1 tsp (5 g) ghee in a heavy pan. Add the onion and fry gently until it is soft and golden brown.
3. Add the black mustard seeds and continue cooking until they pop.
4. Add the freshly squeezed lime juice.
5. Add the fried onion mixture to the rice 5 minutes before the end of cooking, and stir gently.

Crunchy rice

UDUGAMALAM SATHAM

2 cups (16 fl oz or 500 ml) water
1 cup (8 fl oz or 250 ml) long-grain white rice
salt to taste (½ tsp–1 tsp)
1 medium onion
oil for deep frying
(or 2 oz/55 g bought crisp-fried onions)
2 oz (55 g) unsalted roasted peanuts

Onions and peanuts add crunchiness to this rice. Buy ready-roasted peanuts – and, if you are in a hurry, use bought crisp-fried onions, otherwise fry a fresh one.

1. If a fresh onion is used, peel and slice the onion into thin rings. Dry thoroughly with kitchen paper. Deep fry in hot oil until crisp. Remove and drain on kitchen paper. Leave aside until needed.

2. Prepare the rice as stated in the recipe for Simple Rice (p. 14).

3. Garnish the drained cooked rice with the crisp fried onions and peanuts.

Tamarind rice

PULI SATHAM

2 cups (16 fl oz or 500 ml) water
1 cup (8 fl oz or 250 ml) long-grain white rice
salt to taste (½ tsp–1 tsp)
1 oz (30 g) tamarind
2 dried red chillies
1 large onion
ghee or oil for frying
1 tsp black mustard seed
½–1 tsp fenugreek seed (to taste)
1 tsp (5 ml) tomato purée

The pods of the tamarind tree have a sweet yet tangy flavour and have preservative qualities as well (see glossary). Here the sweet, fruity flavour of the tamarind is mingled with a touch of fire from the chillies, making an unforgettable combination of tastes. This rice is best when accompanying strong-flavoured dishes, such as dark meat. Note: *the fenugreek has a distinctive, bitter flavour – go cautiously unless you know you like it.*

1. Prepare and cook the rice as described in Simple Rice (p. 14).

2. Infuse the tamarind in 4 tbsp (60 ml) hot water. Strain after 5 minutes and put the liquid to one side.

3. Halve the dried red chillies and discard the seeds. Peel the onion and chop coarsely.

4. Fry the onion in 1 tbsp (15 g) ghee or oil until soft and golden brown, then add the black mustard seeds. When they start to pop

add the dried red chillies, the fenugreek seeds, the tamarind juice and the tomato purée. Bring to the boil and gently stir into the cooked, drained rice.

Saffron rice

KUNGAMAPU SATHAM

6 shallots
a pinch of saffron strands
1½ cups (12 fl oz or 375 ml) patna rice
3 oz (85 g) ghee
4 cloves
1 inch (2.5 cm) cinnamon bark
2 cardamom pods
4 oz (110 g) cashew nuts
2 oz (55 g) raisins
1 tsp salt (or to taste)
a pinch of turmeric
2 cups (16 fl oz or 500 ml) water
Garnish: 1 onion plus oil for deep frying, or
1 oz (30 g) bought crisp-fried onion
a sprig of fresh coriander

Saffron rice has a royal touch. Yellow was the royal colour of the Muslim kings, and Muslims who arrived in southern India from the north-west in the 14th century brought this dish with them. With its colour and spice, and the sweetness and crunchiness of the cashew nuts, this is truly a dish fit for a king!

1. Peel and slice the shallots. Soak the saffron strands in a little water. Wash the rice and leave to one side.

2. Heat 1 oz (30 g) ghee in a heavy-based saucepan and fry the rice until the ghee is absorbed. Remove and leave to cool a little.

3. Heat the remaining ghee in the same saucepan and fry the cloves, cinnamon bark, cardamoms and cashew nuts until they begin to brown and to give off a lovely aroma. Add the sliced shallots and fry until soft. Then add the raisins, salt, turmeric and cold water and bring to boil.

4. Lower the heat and mix in the rice. Cover the saucepan with a tight-fitting lid and cook until rice is soft and all water is absorbed (about 15 minutes).

5. ONION GARNISH: if a fresh onion is used, peel and slice the onion into thin rings. Dry thoroughly with kitchen paper. Deep fry in hot oil until crisp. Remove and drain on kitchen paper. Leave aside until needed.

6. Serve garnished with fresh coriander leaves and crisp-fried onions.

Yogurt rice

THAYAR SATHAM

2 cups (16 fl oz or 500 ml) water
1 cup (8 fl oz or 250 ml) long-grain white rice
salt to taste (½ tsp–1 tsp)
1 fresh green chilli or 1 dried red chilli
½ inch (1.5 cm) fresh ginger
1 tsp black mustard seeds
ghee
asafoetida (a piece the size of a currant)
4 tbsp (60 ml) plain yogurt
2 neem leaves (or bay leaves)
salt to taste
fresh coriander leaves

Yogurt is commonly used in Madras. Some houses and offices keep large red pots filled with lassi (a yogurt-based drink) which makes a cooling refresher when temperatures reach nearly 40°C (about 100°F). I serve dishes containing yogurt to anyone who is being introduced to spicy food for the first time. On such occasions, yogurt rice is an ideal choice. It is also a useful complement to more fiery or spicy dishes. It is usually served as a second course at large feasts, as it aids digestion.

1. Cook the rice as described in the recipe for Simple Rice (p. 14).
2. De-seed the chilli and slice thinly. Peel and finely slice or grate the fresh ginger.
3. In a medium-sized pan, fry the black mustard seeds in 1 tsp (5 g) ghee until they pop. Next add the neem leaves and asafoetida, and reduce the heat.
4. Add the sliced chilli and the ginger, and continue to fry gently until an aroma arises. Gently stir in the yogurt and cook for a further 1 minute.
5. Remove the yogurt mixture from the heat and pour over the cooked rice. Fork in.
6. The rice may be eaten hot or cold – fork in the chopped fresh coriander leaves before serving.

Tomato rice

TAKALI SATHAM

1 oz (30 g) tamarind
2 medium, ripe tomatoes
2 cups (16 fl oz or 500 ml) water
1 cup (8 fl oz or 250 ml) long-grain white rice
salt to taste (½ tsp–1 tsp)
1 medium-sized onion
1 tsp (5 g) ghee
1 heaped tsp (10 ml) tomato purée
1 oz (30 g) butter

Red and yellow are symbolic colours in Tamil culture. The red-and-yellow flowers that cluster on the tamarind tree are echoed in the custom Tamil women observe of wearing red powder in their hair and a gold chain around their necks, both symbols of marriage. Combined sweetness and acidity enrich and enhance both a good marriage and a tempting dish. In this recipe, the rich red colour and the sweetness of the tomatoes combine with the sweetness and acidity of the tamarind and onions to enrich the rice.

1. Infuse the tamarind ball in 2 tbsp (30 ml) hot water for 5 minutes. Strain the liquid and put to one side.

2. Scald the tomatoes with boiling water and remove the skins. Chop coarsely.

3. Peel and coarsely chop the onion.

4. Wash the rice thoroughly and cook as described in the recipe for Simple Rice (p. 14).

5. While the rice is cooking, fry the onion in the ghee over a medium heat until it is soft and light brown. Add the tamarind liquid to the onion and let it boil gently for 5 minutes. Then add the tomatoes and tomato purée. Lower the heat, cover the pan, and allow the sauce to simmer. It should become quite thick.

6. When the rice is very nearly cooked and most of its cooking water absorbed, add the tomato sauce and stir in gently. Serve.

Biryani

1 lb (450 g) chicken pieces, lamb leg fillet, or king-size prawns (uncooked)

4 fl oz (120 ml) natural yogurt (not required for prawn biryani)

1 large onion

3 green chillies

4 cloves garlic

1 inch (2.5 cm) fresh ginger

1 heaped tsp chilli powder

½ tsp turmeric

salt to taste

water

1½ cups (375 ml) basmati rice

ghee

8 cardamom pods

¼ inch (6 mm) cinnamon bark

4 whole cloves

2 cups (16 fl oz or 500 ml) fresh milk

Biryani is the most exotic rice dish in the whole of Indian cuisine, and basmati, the queen of rice, is used in its preparation. A rich dish of subtly spiced rice cooked together with prawns, chicken, beef or lamb, biryani is generally served with only the simplest accompaniments: yogurt relish with tomato and cucumber, and mint chutney.

Biryani is served at large celebrations and religious festivals. On these occasions it is prepared by the men, out of doors in large clay pots over charcoal fires. At weddings, as members of the bridegroom's party arrive with trays of flowers – decorated with garlands and bearing the bride's wedding clothes – they will be greeted by the delicious scents of biryani wafting on the breeze, whetting their appetites and lingering in their minds during the ceremony.

In England, instead of the clay pot in the garden, I use a heavy casserole dish and cook the biryani in the oven. The result is just as good.

◆ Marinate overnight for best results.

1. Cut the meat into pieces about 1½ inches (4 cm) square and marinate in the yogurt, preferably overnight. (Skin may be left on the chicken or removed, as preferred.) King prawns should be peeled, and deveined (make a slit in the back and remove the black thread), but should not be marinated.

2. Peel and quarter the onion, de-seed the chillies. Finely chop or grind them together in a food processor. Leave to one side.

3. Peel the garlic and ginger; mince or grind finely using a food processor or pestle and mortar.

4. Place the marinated meat (reserving any remaining yogurt), or the prepared prawns in a medium-sized, heavy saucepan with just enough water to cover. Add the chilli powder, turmeric, and ½ tsp salt (or to taste) and the water. Bring to the boil and simmer for 10 minutes (prawns) to 20 minutes (meat). Reserve the stock.

5. Wash the rice and put to one side.

FACING PAGE: *Biryani; yogurt relish,* tayar pachadi *(p. 115)*

6. Melt 2 tbsp (30 g) ghee in a large, heavy-based pan (preferably a cast-iron casserole) and fry the whole spices – cardamoms, cinnamon bark and cloves – over medium heat. When a good aroma is released, add the ground onion and chillies, the garlic and ginger. Keep stirring, over medium heat, until their aroma starts to develop. Next add the washed rice. Lower the heat and continue to stir (if the mixture starts to stick, add a little more ghee).

7. Add the pieces of cooked meat or prawns, 2 cups (16 fl oz or 500 ml) milk (or mixture of milk and remaining yogurt) and 1 cup (8 fl oz or 250 ml) of the reserved stock. Cook for 5 minutes.

8. If necessary, transfer the mixture to a heavy casserole, with a tight-fitting lid. Complete the cooking (covered) in a moderate oven 160°C/325°F, gas mark 3 for 30 minutes (prawns) or an hour (meat). Check at intervals – if at any stage there is insufficient liquid to cook the rice, add extra stock or water.

9. Serve warm, accompanied with yogurt relish (*tayar pachadi*, p. 115) and mint chutney (p. 116).

One story from Madras tells of a young heir who wanted to find the perfect wife. He decided that any woman who could produce a complete meal with two pounds of unthreshed rice would surely have all the qualities he desired, so disguising himself as an itinerant astrologer he set off in search of a bride.

During his travels he was shunned by many, but still he persevered, and one day he met a beautiful maiden whose parents had lost their wealth. Though he fell head over heels in love, he decided he should nonetheless put her to the rice cooking test he had planned, for he knew that an act without circumspection inevitably leads to regrets.

Ponni, the beautiful maiden, accepted his challenge and, the story goes, succeeded (though with a little help from her mother and servant). The servant washed and dried the rice, then Ponni, using the soles of her feet, separated the husks from the dried rice and sold them to the jewellers to use for polishing. With the money she received for the husks she sent her servant to buy firewood which she used to cook the rice. The ingenious young woman then sold the unburnt wood as charcoal, and bought vegetables, ghee, curds and tamarind in exchange.

As the day drew to a close the young man was served a feast of rice broth, vegetable pulao and spiced yogurt, with fragrant cool buttermilk to drink. He finished his dinner a most satisfied man, and the pair were duly married. Ever since then, this long-grain rice has been known as 'Ponni'.

Vegetable pulao

VEDANAYAGAM SHASTIKA

1 cup (8 fl oz or 250 ml) brown basmati rice
2 oz (55 g) fresh green beans
1 oz (30 g) small mushrooms
½ small cauliflower
1 carrot
2 medium onions
2 oz (55 g) peas (fresh or frozen, shelled weight)
6 whole cloves
1 inch (2.5 cm) cinnamon bark
ghee
6 cardamom pods
1 tsp cumin seeds
1 tsp chilli powder
2 cups (16 fl oz or 500 ml) water
salt to taste
sprig fresh coriander

Tamilians celebrate numerous festivals throughout the year. At holi, *celebrated in February, young unmarried girls and boys dress in white and throw coloured powders at each other – green, red and cream. In this dish, often cooked at holi, the green of the peas and beans, the red of the carrots, the cream of the cauliflowers and mushrooms reflect the colours thrown by the young people. It also has a touch of sharpness to remind us of their happiness and mischievousness. At holi, the cook traditionally offers the first mouthful of this dish to the one they love best.*

1. Wash the rice well, leave to drain.

2. Wash and slice the fresh green beans. Wash and cut the cauliflower into small florets. Wash or wipe and halve the mushrooms. Peel the carrot and onions and slice ⅛ inch (3 mm) thick. Shell the peas if necessary.

3. Grind the whole cloves and cinnamon bark very coarsely in a coffee grinder, or crush them with a pestle and mortar – this helps to release their flavours.

4. In a heavy-based saucepan or frying-pan with a tightly fitting lid, heat 2 oz (55 g) ghee and fry the cardamom pods, the crushed whole cloves and cinnamon bark until an aroma arises.

5. Then add the sliced onions and the cumin seeds, and cook until the onions are soft and golden. Mix in the chilli powder.

6. Stir in the prepared vegetables and cook for 2–5 minutes over a low heat.

7. Mix in the washed rice and fry, stirring, until all the ghee has been absorbed. Add the water and salt to taste.

8. Cover the pan with a tight-fitting lid. Raise the heat and bring the ingredients to the boil.

9. Lower the heat as far as possible and simmer, covered, until the rice and vegetables are soft. It will take approximately 20 minutes.

Alternatively, the pulao may be transferred to a moderately hot oven (160°C/325°F, gas mark 3) and cooked for around 20 minutes.

10. Garnish with fresh coriander leaves before serving. The pulao is good accompanied by coconut chutney or mint chutney (p. 116).

Prawn pulao

ARUMAINAYAGAM CHITTARANAM

1 lb (450 g) large prawns, preferably uncooked
salt
½ tsp turmeric
1 tsp chilli powder
2 medium onions
1 cup (8 fl oz or 250 ml) patna rice
1 inch (2.5 cm) cinnamon bark
4 cloves
1 tsp cumin seeds
4 cardamom pods
2 cups (16 fl oz or 500 ml) water
1 sprig fresh coriander

Large and exceptionally tasty prawns are caught in the waters around Madras. The combination of delicious juicy prawns and the fragrance of the spices makes this a remarkable pulao dish. It's best to use fresh prawns if you can, preferably uncooked (greyish in colour, rather than pink). Frozen prawns are often salted, so to reduce the saltiness let them thaw then rinse well before cooking.

1. Shell and wash the prawns. Marinate them with 1 tsp salt (exclude salt if using frozen prawns that are salted), turmeric and chilli powder for 20 minutes.

2. Peel the onions and chop coarsely.

3. Wash the rice and leave to one side. Grind the cinnamon bark and cloves in a coffee grinder or with a pestle and mortar.

4. In a large frying-pan or large iron casserole (choose one with a tightly fitting lid) fry the marinated prawns in 2 tbsp (30 g) ghee until nearly done (around 5 minutes for raw prawns, 3 minutes for cooked ones, depending on size) then remove from the ghee and leave to one side.

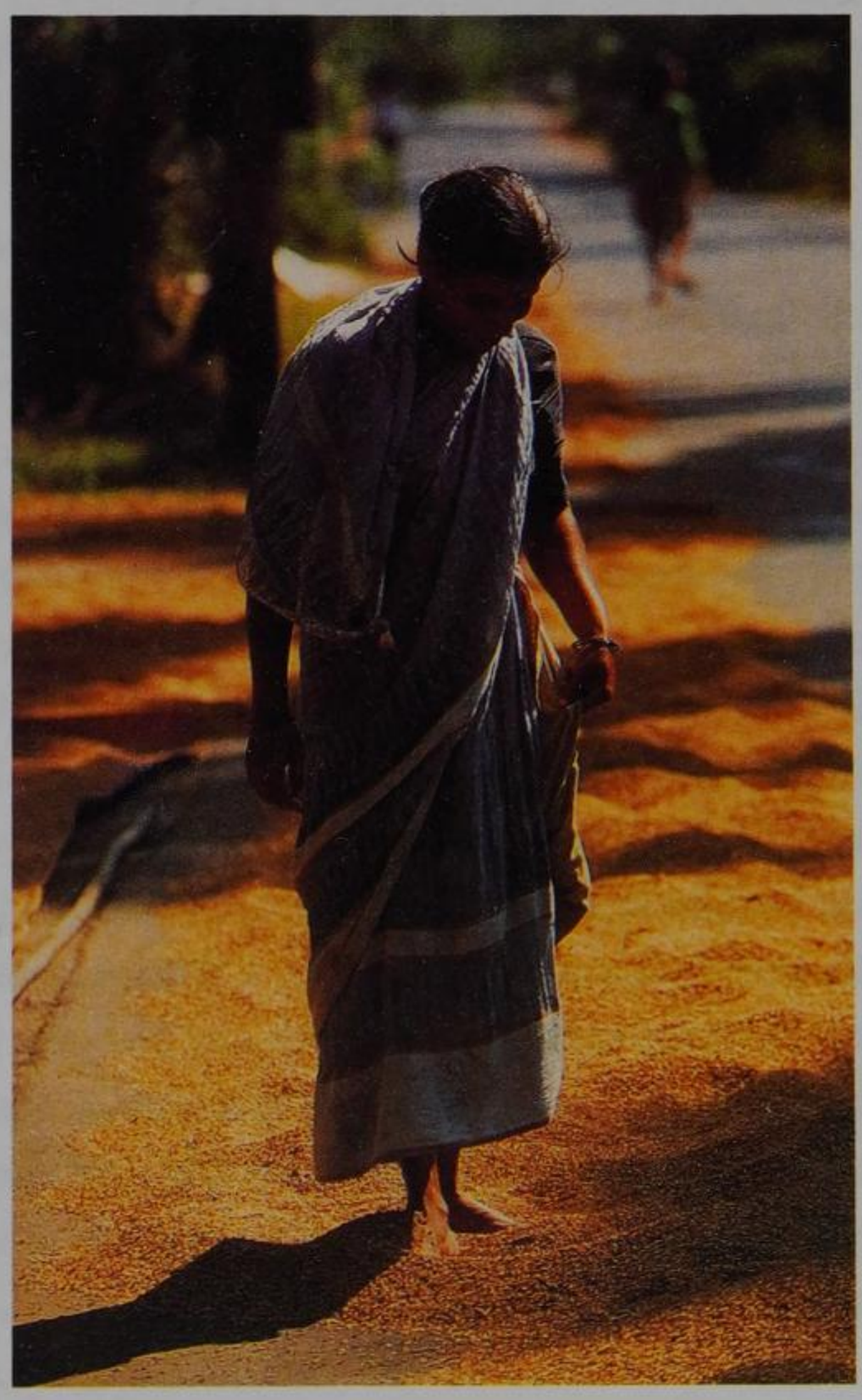
5. In the same ghee fry the coarsely chopped onions until they are soft. Add the cumin seeds, cardamom pods, ground cloves and cinnamon bark, and fry until there is an aroma.

6. Add the washed rice and fry until all the ghee has been absorbed,

and the rice is translucent. Add the cold water, a teaspoon of salt and the fried prawns. Cover the pan, raise the heat slightly and bring to the boil.

7. Lower the heat as low as possible and simmer, tightly covered, for 20 minutes. The rice should be cooked and soft (if it becomes dry before it is cooked, add a small amount of cold water and continue cooking). Alternatively, the pulao may be transferred to a moderately hot oven (190°C/375°F, gas mark 6) and cooked for around 20 minutes.

8. Serve garnished with chopped fresh coriander leaves.



Drying the harvest

BREADS AND PANCAKES

Long before Western-style loaves came to Madras in the 19th century, the usual forms of bread were *chappatis, parathas, rotis* and *pooris* – all flat, unleavened breads, generally made with *atta* flour (finely ground wheatmeal). In Madras, the flour is often freshly ground at home, using a large grinding stone.

These Indian breads are all eaten while warm, and freshly cooked, and are generally used to scoop up foods they are eaten with. Although these breads go with many different dishes, they are usually eaten with their traditional accompaniments: chappatis with *dhall*; paratha with prawns; poori with potatoes.

Chappatis, parathas and rotis are all baked on a griddle (or in a heavy frying-pan). Chappatis are the simplest bread, and quick to make: they are about 6 inches (15 cm) in diameter, thin and soft. Parathas are a layered bread, rich in ghee and rather filling, while Madras rotis (which are different from rotis in the north) are made with white flour and are richer still. They are sometimes cooked with a delicious creamy filling of minced meat and nuts to become a meal in themselves.

Chappatis, parathas and rotis are eaten mainly in the evening rather than rice, though in some Tamil homes both bread and rice are served in the evening and it is a matter of preference what one has.

Note: These breads start to dry rapidly if they are not eaten straight from the pan, but keep well if they are wrapped in foil immediately (you can put them in the oven to keep warm, or sit them back on the griddle, which will retain some of its heat after cooking).

Pooris are prepared rather like chappatis, but then deep fried so they puff up into a light, soft bread. Sometimes pooris are eaten for breakfast as a change from more usual *dosais* (which are like pancakes), *appams* or *idlis*.

Dosais, appams and idlis are all made from batters of rice and grams (pulses) or coconut, allowed to

stand overnight so they begin to ferment – this gives them a distinctive and delicious (almost yogurt-like) tang. The idli batter is steamed to make little rice cakes; the dosais, however, are magnificent pale-golden pancakes (street vendors make them 18 inches/45 cm across), very thin, crispy on the surface yet slightly spongy inside. Appams (also called hoppers) are pancakes with a soft middle but a crisp, lacy-textured surface – they are a great favourite with Tamilians.

Simple flat bread

CHAPPATIS

MAKES 8

8 oz (225 g) atta flour

4 fl oz (120 ml) water (heated to blood temperature)

2 oz (60 g) ghee or margarine, melted

½–1 level tsp salt (to taste)

oil

This is the simplest of all breads, made just of atta (a fine wheatmeal) flour, ghee, and water. Making chappatis is an extremely quick and simple process, since the dough does not require fermentation, although you do need to prepare it at least half an hour in advance. The chappatis are rolled before cooking (traditionally, the art of rolling chappatis was said to help young women maintain their figures but chappati presses were brought onto the market to save time).

In Madras, the high temperatures mean that the water is usually naturally warm – when I came to England I learned I had to warm the water first in order to get the dough to work properly (it should be blood temperature: when tested with your little finger it should feel neither hot nor cold). It is also important to heat the ghee until it melts but does not become hot – otherwise it will start to cook the flour when you add it. If atta flour (also sold as chappati flour) is unavailable, try to use fine wheatmeal flour, but not wholemeal as this has a much coarser texture.

The instructions are for making chappati dough by hand, although a food processor may also be used.

1. Measure the flour and salt into a bowl. Make a well in the flour and add the melted ghee. Gradually add the water, mixing with the fingers until a soft dough is formed. (The quantity of water required depends on the flour – use slightly less or more to get the right, soft, consistency.)

2. Knead for 10 minutes (3 minutes in a food processor), then form into a ball. Wrap in a damp cloth and allow to stand for at least half an hour before using.

3. On a floured board form the dough into eight walnut-sized balls and roll them into rounds 5 inches (13 cm) in diameter (keep covered with the dampened cloth to stop them from drying out).

4. Grease a griddle or heavy frying-pan (preferably cast iron) with a drop of oil, and heat. With the cloth dampen both sides of the first chappati, then place it on the griddle. Press it down with a spatula, and keep it on the move so that it does not stick. When the first side is pale brown (with a few brown spots) turn and cook on the other side. Remove from the griddle.

5. Repeat the process until all the chappatis are made. They should be served immediately after cooking, or immediately wrapped in foil and kept warm, otherwise they will begin to harden.

FACING PAGE: *Dosais (p. 34) with drumstick sambar (p. 122) and coconut chutney (p. 116)*

Puffed bread

POORIS

MAKES 12–15

2 oz (55 g) plain flour
8 oz (225 g) atta flour
1 tsp salt
1 tsp bicarbonate of soda
2 oz (55 g) ghee or margarine, melted
6–8 tbsp (90–120 ml) water
oil for frying

In September each year Tamilians celebrate the Hindu festival Navaratri (which literally means 'goodnight'), when prayers are said for children. On this special day of the year, children are allowed to stay up all night, playing until morning with special little dolls that are dressed in fine clothes, and enjoying treats and special snacks. In the evening young girls help their mothers make the dough for pooris.

This bread is deep-fried in a kadai, or wok, to form little light, wheaten puff-balls. A deep fryer may also be used. The pooris puff and bubble up when they are placed in the hot oil, and should be turned over and removed with a metal strainer immediately or they will become too crispy. The oil in the wok should not be allowed to get smoking hot or the pooris will burn.

The dough should be prepared at least an hour before use, and pooris should be eaten straight away as they collapse when cold.

1. Sift both the flours into a mixing bowl. Add the salt and bicarbonate of soda. Make a well in the flour and add the melted ghee. Gradually add the water. Mix the flour with fingers to make a soft dough. (A food processor may also be used.)

2. Knead the dough for 10 minutes (3 minutes in a food processor), then form it into a ball. Wrap in a damp cloth and allow to stand for at least an hour before using.

3. Form the dough into 12–15 evenly sized balls. On a floured board flatten and roll each ball of dough into a 2-inch (5-cm) disc, then place on a tray. (Keep them covered so they do not dry out.)

4. Heat a few inches oil in a wok or deep fryer (the temperature can be tested by dropping a small cube of bread into the oil – it should rise to the top). Drop in one poori at a time and press down into the oil with a wooden spoon. Turn it over and as soon as it puffs up remove and drain on kitchen paper. Serve at once or wrap in foil to keep warm.

Layered wheat bread

PARATHAS

MAKES 12

12 oz (340 g) atta flour
¼ tsp salt
6 oz (170 g) ghee, melted
½ pint (300 ml) boiling water

Parathas are flat, layered, wheat bread, one of the most popular alternatives to rice as an accompaniment to Tamilian dishes of all kinds. They are also sold as snacks: at Hindu festivals vendors do a roaring trade selling parathas to the hungry visitors.

Parathas are small (about 3 inches/8 cm across) but heavier than chappatis and quite filling. They are best dipped in the accompanying dish, though some people prefer to roll them up with a little of the food wrapped in them. However you eat them, I hope you enjoy them as much as I do.

◆ The dough needs to be started about an hour before it is cooked.

1. Sieve the flour and salt into a mixing bowl (a food processor may also be used) and make a well in the centre. Pour 1 tbsp (15 ml) ghee into the well in the flour, and mix well. Pour in a quarter of the boiling water to form a soft dough which shouldn't be too sticky. Knead the dough well for 15 minutes (5 minutes in a food processor), and form it into a ball. Sprinkle with 1 tbsp (15 ml) water, cover with a damp cloth and leave for 30 minutes.

2. On a floured surface, roll out the dough into a long sausage. Divide the dough into 12 portions. Roll each one into a thin disc 5 inches (13 cm) in diameter.

3. Re-melt the remaining ghee if necessary. Brush the surface of each disc with melted ghee and fold it in half, brush with ghee again and fold to a quarter. Form each quarter into a ball again. Slightly flatten each ball with the palm of your hand, and roll out again to a disc 3 inches (8 cm) in diameter.

4. Heat a heavy-based cast-iron frying-pan or a griddle, greased with ghee. Cook each paratha on one side, then turn it over (spreading more ghee on the griddle before replacing the paratha). Cook until both sides are crisp and golden brown. Serve at once or keep warm wrapped in foil.

Rich white bread

VASANTHA'S ROTI

MAKES 12

8 oz (225 g) plain white flour
¼ tsp salt
12 oz (340 g) ghee
4 fl oz (120 ml) boiling water

Roti is a nutritious and filling layered bread made of plain white flour. Originally it came from Ootacamund, up in the Nilgiri Hills in western Tamil Nadu, home of the Todar people who eat it to keep out the cold in winter. Roti is traditionally cooked on a heavy griddle over a charcoal fire, and street vendors practise their showmanship by tossing the dough around as they work it. However, a rolling-pin and a griddle or heavy-based frying-pan will also produce excellent results. This recipe was taught me by my aunt Vasantha.

◆ The dough needs to be prepared 2 or 3 hours before cooking.

1. Sieve flour and salt into a mixing bowl. A food processor may also be used. Make a well in the flour and pour in a third of the melted ghee. Mix well and gradually add water until a soft dough is formed. Knead for 15 minutes (5 minutes in a food processor) until the dough is of silky consistency. Make into a ball, cover with a damp cloth, and leave aside for 2–3 hours for the dough to soften.

2. Divide the dough into 12 equal-sized balls. On a well-floured board roll each ball into a disc 10 inches (25 cm) in diameter. Sprinkle with a teaspoon of melted ghee and fold the edges into the middle to form a square. Sprinkle with a little flour and roll out slightly to 5 inches (13 cm) diameter. Keep covered so that the dough does not dry out.

3. Heat a griddle or heavy-based frying-pan (preferably cast iron), and grease with a little ghee. Place a piece of dough on the griddle and cook until it is slightly brown on one side. Turn it over and brown slightly.

4. Remove the roti and spread a teaspoonful of ghee on the griddle. Replace the roti and cook on one side for 2 minutes. Remove the roti, spread another teaspoonful of ghee and cook the second side for 2 minutes. Remove and keep warm, wrapped in foil.

5. Repeat the process until all the dough is used.

MAIDA'S STUFFED ROTI

MAKES 12

Dough made as in the recipe for roti, facing page (this needs to stand for 2–3 hours before use)

1 large onion

2 green chillies

¼ in (6 mm) fresh ginger

2 cloves garlic

4 oz (110 g) spinach

¼ tsp turmeric

1 tsp chilli powder

2 tsp ground cumin

ghee

¼ inch (6 mm) cinnamon bark

4 oz (110 g) lean lamb mince

1 oz (30 g) cashew nuts

½ tsp salt

¼-inch (6-mm) cube coconut cream or 2 tsp coconut milk powder

8 oz (225g) ghee for cooking

This is a delicious elaboration on the recipe opposite. The filling is fresh, lean minced lamb mixed with spinach and cashew nuts, all cooked together in a creamy, spicy sauce.

Stuffed rotis are considered to be a meal on their own – the only accompaniment would be a vegetable dish. Actual cooking time is very quick, about 5 minutes for each roti.

THE STUFFING

1. Peel and chop the onion coarsely. De-seed and chop the green chillies. Peel the ginger and garlic and chop very finely. Wash the spinach and slice coarsely.

2. Make a paste with the turmeric, chilli powder, ground cumin and 1 tbsp (15 ml) water.

3. Heat 1 tsp (5 g) ghee in a saucepan. When the ghee is melted add the cinnamon bark. When there is a slight aroma add the chopped onion, and continue to fry until it has softened but not browned. Then add the ginger, garlic and chillies. Keep frying for another minute before adding the prepared spice paste and salt; keep stirring until the aroma is released.

4. Add the minced lamb and 1 tbsp (15 ml) water. Cover, and cook over a medium heat for 10 minutes. Meanwhile, fry the cashew nuts in 1 tsp (5 g) ghee until golden, and set aside.

5. Lower the heat under the lamb mixture, and add the coconut (cream or milk powder) and spinach. Continue to cook, uncovered, for about 5 minutes or until most of the moisture has gone. Stir in the fried cashews. Remove the pan from the heat and leave to cool.

ASSEMBLY AND COOKING

1. Divide the dough into 12 equal-sized balls. On a well-floured board roll each ball into a disc 10 inches (25 cm) in diameter. Spread with a teaspoon of melted ghee (right to the edges), then spread the middle 4 inches (10 cm) with 2 teaspoons of the filling. Fold the edges of the dough into the middle to cover the ingredients

One of the most famous seasonal festivals in southern India occurs in July at Kanchipuram, famous for its silk saris. This is very much a women's festival when the women wear green saris to welcome the monsoon rains. Here numerous vendors sell their stuffed roti to the crowds of visitors who come to see the Goddess Parvati, goddess of the monsoon, carried in procession accompanied by elephants bearing ceremonial umbrellas.

and make a square about 4 inches (10 cm) across. Sprinkle the upper surface with a little flour and press slightly.

2. Heat a griddle or heavy-based frying-pan (preferably cast iron), and grease with a little ghee. Place the filled dough in the frying-pan (folds upwards) and fry until lightly browned. Turn it over and brown slightly on the other side.

3. Remove the roti and spread a teaspoon of ghee on the griddle. Replace the roti and cook on one side for 2 minutes. Remove the roti, spread the griddle with more ghee and cook the other side of the roti for 2 minutes. Remove and serve or keep warm in the oven, covered with foil.

4. Repeat the process until all the dough and filling are used.

Rice and gram pancakes

DOSAIS

MAKES AROUND 12 8-INCH (20-CM) DOSAIS

5 oz (140 g) cleaned split black grams (urad dhall)
10 oz (285 g) long-grain rice
2 fl oz (60 ml) water
ghee
1 tsp bicarbonate of soda
1–1½ tsp salt
oil

Dosais are beautiful, pale-golden pancakes, crispy on the surface yet slightly spongy inside. The best ones are made with a lot of ghee to ensure they are thin and crisp – ones made by the Madras dosai vendors are enormous, up to 18 inches (45 cm) across, but home-made ones are about 8 inches (20 cm) in diameter. Dosais may be eaten as an accompaniment, to scoop up other food, but are most often eaten for breakfast, together with sambar (p. 122), and coconut chutney (p. 116) – see photograph on p. 29.

Dosais can be made with a variety of batters, each giving a slightly different texture or colour, but the traditional mix is of the rice and split grams used in this recipe. The mixture of rice and split black grams is prepared in advance and allowed to ferment overnight, and is ground to a batter the next day (traditionally, young girls were said to have improved their figures and their posture by the heavy job of grinding the rice with a heavy granite pestle and

mortar – a method still used by Tamil women in villages). The food processor is a great help.

In Madras, dosais are cooked on a dosai kalu, *which translated means 'dosai stone'. The dosai kalu is in fact made of cast iron and needs to be kept clean and oiled at all times. A good substitute is a heavy griddle or cast-iron frying-pan, both of which distribute the heat well. The pan is wiped with a cloth dipped in oil before the mixture is ladled into it.*

Making good dosais is an art, and like any pancake-making needs a little practice. They are well worth it.

◆ This recipe requires 2 standing periods (6 hours for the grain mixture, and at least 12 hours for the finished batter).

1. Soak the black grams (urad dhall) and long-grain rice separately for at least 6 hours, preferably overnight. Strain.

2. Grind the soaked rice in a food processor, adding a little water at a time, until the mixture becomes a smooth batter.

3. Grind the grams in the same way, then mix the rice batter with the split gram batter. Beat in the bicarbonate of soda and salt for 5 minutes. Leave in a warm place, loosely covered, for 12 hours for it to ferment.

4. Heat a heavy-based frying-pan (preferably with an 8-inch/20-cm base). Place a little oil in a bowl. Grease the frying-pan with a cloth dipped in the oil.

5. Before using the batter, stir once with a spoon. Ladle 2–3 tbsp (30–45 ml) batter into the centre of the frying-pan and distribute it evenly with the rounded base of the ladle, working it outwards using circular movements until a pancake 8 inches (20 cm) in diameter is formed. Trickle a little melted ghee round the edges of the dosai, to help make it crisp. Cook for 2 minutes until it is brown. Then turn it over and cook for another 2 minutes. Add another drop of ghee round the edges again. The dosai is ready to be eaten. Serve straight away.

6. Before making the next dosai wipe the frying-pan again with the oil-soaked cloth.

Stuffed crisp pancakes

MASALA DOSAIS

Masala dosais are made as in the previous recipe (with slightly different proportions of rice and grams), but are rolled up, and have a vegetable masala filling (recipe below). Alternatively, the dosais can be filled with masala potato (p. 56). They are served with sambar (p. 122) and coconut chutney (p. 116).

This is a dish which is particularly associated with marriage. For instance, it is traditional for the families of the bride and groom to choose the couple's wedding clothes. Choosing a wedding sari is fun but back-breaking, since the women have to sit on carpets while the gold and silver saris are spread out on long, low platforms to be scrutinised. Afterwards, everyone appreciates going to a restaurant to have a restorative masala dosai!

◆ This recipe requires 2 standing periods (6 hours for the grain mixture, and at least 12 hours for the finished batter).

MAKES AROUND 12 8-INCH (20-CM) MASALA DOSAIS

FOR THE DOSAI BATTER

4 oz (110 g) cleaned split black grams (urad dhall)
12 oz (340 g) long-grain rice
1 tsp fenugreek seeds
4 tbsp (60 ml) water
ghee
1 tsp bicarbonate of soda
1–1½ tsp salt

FOR THE FILLING

3 small potatoes
2 small carrots
1 oz (30 g) fresh green beans
3 shallots or 1 small onion
1 green chilli
ghee
1 tsp black mustard seeds
1 oz (30 g) split cleaned black grams (urad dhall)
¼ tsp turmeric

THE BATTER

1. Place the split cleaned black grams (urad dhall) in a bowl and cover with water. Place the long-grain rice and fenugreek seeds in a separate bowl and cover with water. Allow the grams and rice to soak for at least 6 hours, preferably overnight.

2. Strain the soaked rice, then blend in a food processor, adding the water a little at a time, until the mixture becomes a smooth batter. Grind the grams in the same way.

3. Mix the rice batter with the split gram batter. Add the bicarbonate of soda and salt and beat for 5 minutes. Cover loosely and leave in a warm place overnight for the batter to ferment.

4. The next day the dosai batter is ready for use.

THE FILLING

1. Peel the potatoes and carrots, and dice finely. Parboil them for 1–2 minutes, drain and set aside. Wash and cut the fresh green

beans into ¼-inch (6-mm) lengths. Peel and slice the shallots into fine slices. De-seed and finely chop the chilli.

2. Heat 1 tsp (5 g) ghee in a saucepan and fry the black mustard seeds until they pop. Then add the grams and cook until they turn brown.

3. Then add the sliced shallot, chopped green chilli and turmeric. When an aroma rises add the potatoes, carrots and beans. Add 4 tbsp (60 ml) water, cover the pan and cook over a low heat until vegetables are soft. Remove the saucepan and leave to cool.

THE DOSAIS AND ASSEMBLY

1. Heat a heavy-based frying-pan, preferably 8 inches (20 cm) in diameter. Place a little oil in a bowl. Grease the frying-pan with a cloth dipped in the oil.

2. Stir the batter gently before use. Ladle 2–3 tbsp (30–45 ml) batter into the centre of the frying-pan and distribute it evenly with the rounded base of the ladle, working it outwards using circular movements until a pancake 8 inches (20 cm) in diameter is formed. Trickle a little melted ghee round the edges of the dosai to make it crisp. Cook for 2 minutes until it is brown. Then turn it over and cook until slightly brown.

3. Place a tablespoon of filling in the centre of the dosai. Cook for another minute. Then roll the dosai to form a cylinder. Remove the dosai from the pan with a flat metal slice and serve at once.

4. Before making the next dosai wipe the frying pan again with the oil-soaked cloth.

Rice pancakes

APPAMS

MAKES ABOUT 15

8 oz (225 g) long-grain rice
2 oz (55 g) grated coconut or
1 oz (30 g) coconut milk powder
1 tsp bicarbonate of soda
salt to taste
oil for greasing

Tamilians are not only divided into castes, but into different communities, and marriages between these different groups are not encouraged. One community is well known as tree climbers: they climb the palmyra palms to tap the toddy. This liquid is sweet and non-alcoholic when it is drunk fresh (left overnight it ferments and becomes alcoholic).

Appams – pancakes with a lovely, lacy pattern on the outside, and spongy inside – were introduced by this community and traditionally fresh toddy is added to help the batter to ferment. The outer edges are dry and crisp when hot, but flop when cold. Thus the local nickname of 'floppers'. They go well with thick coconut milk (see glossary) sweetened with sugar. Appams are normally made in a small wok – a crêpe pan may also be used, though it won't give the distinctive concave shape.

◆ The rice needs to stand for 3 hours and the batter overnight.

1. Wash the rice and soak it for at least 3 hours. Grind with water in an electric blender.

2. Mix the grated coconut or coconut milk powder with 4 tbsp (60 ml) hot water to make coconut milk (if using fresh coconut, strain the liquid after 5 minutes, and discard the pulp).

3. Add the coconut milk, bicarbonate of soda and salt to the batter. Mix in well and leave overnight.

4. Whisk the batter well before making the appams – it should have a smooth, pancake-batter consistency .

5. Grease the wok with a cloth dipped in oil. Place a tablespoonful of batter in the heated wok. Tilt the wok slightly all round so that the batter clings to the sides, making a 5-inch (13-cm) appam (some batter will remain in the middle). Cook until the sides are crisp – the middle will be soft. Serve hot immediately (or keep covered on a warmed plate for a few minutes).

Steamed dumplings

TIDLI IDLIS

MAKES AROUND 24 (SERVES 6–8)

8 oz (225 g) cleaned split black grams (urad dhall)
10 oz (285 g) long-grain rice
ghee
1 tsp bicarbonate of soda
1 tsp salt

Idlis are light, fluffy steamed rice-and-gram dumplings. Accompanied by coffee, they are mainly eaten for breakfast, though restaurants in Madras serve them as a snack throughout the day. They are sometimes served with coconut chutney (p. 116) or sambar (p. 122), or with sugar.

Though the batter needs to stand overnight, the cooking itself is simple and takes less than a quarter of an hour.

Idlis are cooked in utensils similar to egg poachers. In fact an egg poacher will do the job very well, or you can buy an idli steamer from a specialist store.

◆ The mixture has to ferment overnight.

1. Wash both the cleaned split black grams and the rice, and put them to soak, separately, in water overnight or for 6 hours.

2. Strain the rice, and grind it in a food processor with 2 tbsp (30 ml) water, making a coarse batter. Remove and set aside.

3. Strain the grams and grind in a food processor with a little water – this should make a smooth batter. Mix the two batters together and stir in the salt and bicarbonate of soda. Leave to stand overnight, loosely covered, in a warm place to ferment.

4. Grease the egg poacher or idli tray with ghee. Place 1 tbsp (15 ml) of idli batter in the middle of each compartment, and smooth it with the back of the spoon. Cover, and steam the idlis for 10–15 minutes. They will rise and can be tested with a cocktail stick (if it comes out clean the idlis are cooked). Serve immediately.

Dawn is regarded as an auspicious time for house-moving. The night before, a religious token and a jar of salt are left in the new house, for luck. Next morning the new householder goes to the temple and brings back a young calf (symbolising the goddess Indra). He leads it through the house to the sound of musical pipes. The wife boils milk (also a symbol of the goddess) for coffee, for her breakfast guests. As idlis contain auspicious black grams, they are a dish served at a special breakfast like this.

VEGETABLES

Tamil Nadu is officially a Hindu state, and as the Hindu Brahmin caste is vegetarian, vegetables and pulses are the basis of the Tamil diet. Many people do eat meat and fish but even so, these are not the centrepiece of a meal the way they are traditionally in the West. For everybody, Hindu or not, at least one meal a day will be vegetarian, hence the abundance of vegetable dishes in Tamil cuisine.

Custom, too, plays an important role in the Tamilians' diet: many Tamilians have a vegetable meal on the eve of an important occasion, as abstention from meat is associated with purity.

A vegetarian meal generally consists of five or six vegetables with rice and dhall (a lentil dish, p. 62), chutney or relish, and yogurt. Two hard vegetables, such as carrots, potatoes or pumpkin, will be combined with two fresh leafy ones, such as spinach or cabbage, and perhaps also with juicy aubergines, plump gourd or beans. So strong is the division of vegetables into the 'hard' and 'leafy' groups that each type has its own name, and there is no one Tamilian word for 'vegetables'.

Thanks to the climate and good soil, an excellent variety of vegetables is available cheaply throughout the year. Some are sold from carts wheeled along the streets, others at the vegetable markets, still more by the women who carry on their heads baskets of home-grown produce.

Vegetables are generally cooked quickly, using a traditional method of braising and steaming, so that they retain their full flavour and a little crispness.

Charred capsicums

CHUTTA PERISA MALIGAI

6 capsicums (as wide a range of colours as possible)
2 medium onions
1 clove of garlic
2 tomatoes
ghee
1 tsp black mustard seeds
1 tsp lovage seeds
2 cardamom pods
½ tsp chilli powder
¼ tsp turmeric
¼ tsp salt (or to taste)
2 tbsp brown sugar (optional)

Tamils still use the ancient method of cooking this dish in the charcoal ashes of a clay oven, and this certainly imparts a flavour which is more difficult to achieve with modern methods, although you can get a similar effect by searing the vegetables under a grill. The result is that the differing flavours of the capsicums are retained, with a touch of the barbecue added. Removing the charred skins is a fiddly job, and takes some time. The vegetables are then chopped and sautéed. (If available, use a mixture of capsicums, including white, orange and purple.)

Sugar is often added, enhancing the natural sweetness of the capsicums, and making this a good complement to more fiery dishes. (For a crunchier texture, a few roasted sunflower seeds or unsalted cashew nuts may be added before serving.)

1. Char the skins of the capsicums: either on a hot charcoal barbecue, under a hot grill (quarter them first and lay them skin uppermost) or by holding them in a gas flame using two forks. The skin will scorch and blister. Once cool enough to touch, remove the skin and any remaining stalk or seeds. Cut the pulp into ½-inch (1.5-cm) squares.

2. Peel the onions and chop coarsely. Peel and crush the garlic. Wash and roughly chop the tomatoes. Put aside.

3. In a saucepan heat 2 tsp (10 g) ghee and fry the black mustard seeds, lovage seeds and the cardamom pods. When the black mustard seeds pop add the sliced onions and crushed garlic, and fry until soft and golden brown. Add the chilli powder and turmeric and fry for 2 minutes. Then add the chopped tomatoes, salt and sugar. Finally add the capsicums and fry, stirring, for 5 minutes. Cover and cook for a further 3–5 minutes to allow the flavours to blend.

Fried small purple aubergines

KATRIKA PORIYAL

1 medium onion
1 green chilli
8 oz (225 g) small round aubergines
1 oz (30 g) fresh coriander leaves
ghee
1 tsp chilli powder
½ tsp turmeric
salt to taste

There are many varieties of aubergine, or brinjal (the Tamil name is katrika) in Madras: long green ones, big purple ones and small round lilac ones. The long white aubergines are usually added to sambar (see p. 122). For this recipe the small round purple aubergines are best, being sweeter than the other varieties, but any sort may be used.

1. Peel and chop the onion coarsely. De-seed and slice the green chilli. Wash and dice the aubergines. Coarsely chop the coriander.

2. Fry the onion in 1 tsp (5 g) ghee until soft.

3. Continue frying and add the chilli powder and the turmeric. They should quickly brown and cook. Then add the cubed aubergines, salt, coriander leaves and green chilli. Stir for about 5 minutes.

4. Add 4 tbsp (60 ml) water, cover the pan, and cook until the aubergines and onions are soft and moist (10–15 minutes). Serve garnished with coriander leaves.

Mangetout with ginger and chilli

PADAIPAI AVARAKA

4 oz (110 g) mangetout
1 inch (2.5 cm) fresh ginger
1 green chilli
oil
1 tsp chilli powder
½ tsp salt (or to taste)

The job of topping and tailing the mangetout is often grandma's task. Mangetout are commonly served as an accompanying vegetable, or cooked together with fried beef or mutton. In this recipe, the ginger and chilli combine beautifully with the mangetout.

1. Top and tail the washed mangetout. Peel and slice the ginger. De-seed the chilli and slice finely.

2. In 1 tsp (5 ml) oil fry the chilli powder for a few seconds. Then add the whole mangetout and stir them in.

3. Add the sliced fresh ginger and green chilli. Add 2 tbsp (30 ml) water and salt. Cover, and cook until the mangetout are tender (5–10 minutes).

Though only Brahmins are usually strictly vegetarian, vegetarian traditions are significant for everybody. On religious days, for example, only pulses, vegetables and rice are eaten (some Christians practise this on Good Friday). And during pregnancy or after the birth of a child, the vegetables and pulses are considered as very important sources of nutrients. After the death of a member of the family, no meat is eaten for 14 days.

Green peas with lovage seeds

NAGAPATINAM PATANI

1 small onion
1 clove garlic
¼ inch (6 mm) fresh ginger
1 green chilli
8 oz (225 g) shelled fresh garden peas
ghee
1 tsp lovage seeds
½ tsp ground coriander
salt to taste
fresh coriander leaves

Tamilians traded with Ancient Greece and Rome; among the foods enterprising traders brought East were peas, and Tamilian women cooked them in their own way, with a touch of spice. Tamilians can buy shelled garden peas in the vegetable markets today, and in Ootacamund large baskets of peas can be seen in summer. The lovage seeds add a hint of licorice to this extremely simple dish. Tender broad beans may be substituted.

1. Peel and slice the onion. Peel and chop the garlic and ginger. De-seed and slice the fresh green chilli.

2. Shell the peas. Heat 1 tsp (5 g) ghee and fry the lovage seeds over medium heat. Add the onion and fry until slightly golden, then add the ginger and garlic.

3. Next add the peas, then the ground coriander, salt to taste and 4 tsp (20 ml) water. Turn down to a very low heat, cover the pan and cook until the peas are soft (about 10 minutes). Just at the end of cooking add the roughly chopped fresh coriander leaves.

FACING PAGE: *Duck with coconut (p. 95); cabbage with onions and black mustard seeds (p. 53); green peas with lovage seeds and chappatis (p. 27).*

Just okra

TANKASI VENDAKAI

8 oz (225 g) okra
1 medium onion
1 tsp (5 ml) oil
1 tsp black mustard seeds
2 tbsp (30 ml) milk
salt to taste

The Tamil name for this vegetable is vendakai, though we often call it ladies' fingers. Here the okra are sliced and cooked in a mild, creamy sauce – the black mustard seeds release the flavour of the vegetable. This is extremely quick and simple to prepare, the most time-consuming part being the topping and tailing.

1. Wash, top and tail the okra. Split them in half lengthwise (optional) and cut them into ¼-inch (6-mm) lengths.

2. Peel the onion and chop it coarsely.

3. In a little oil over a medium heat fry the onion until soft.

4. Add the black mustard seeds and fry until they pop. Add the okra.

5. Fry the okra with the onion for a minute, salt to taste. Then gradually add the milk. Lower the heat.

6. Cover tightly and cook for 5–10 minutes until the okra is cooked but still slightly firm. If the okra becomes dry during cooking, add a little water.

Spiced okra

TIRUNVELI VENDAKAI

Sometimes Tamilians prefer vegetables to be a little spicier, especially when part of a vegetarian dinner. The rich tamarind sauce used here produces a dish very different from 'Just okra'.

8 oz (225 g) okra
1 medium onion
1 clove garlic
2 red chillies
1 oz (30 g) tamarind
oil or ghee
salt to taste
¼ tsp sugar

1. Top and tail the washed okra and cut each into ¼-inch (6-mm) slices.

2. Peel and quarter the onion, peel the garlic. De-seed the red chillies. Blend together roughly in a food processor (or chop finely and grind in a pestle and mortar).

3. Infuse the tamarind in 3 tbsp (45 ml) hot water for 5 minutes. Mix well and strain. Leave the liquid to one side.

4. Heat 1 tbsp (15 ml) oil or ghee, and fry the ground ingredients over a medium heat until fragrant. Then add the okra and fry for 1–2 minutes. Add the tamarind juice, salt and sugar. Lower the heat, cover and simmer for 5–10 minutes. Remove and serve hot.

Fried long beans

VEDDATHANAI PORICHAR BEANS

1 lb (450 g) long beans
1 medium onion
oil for frying
1 tsp chilli powder
¼ tsp turmeric
½ tsp salt (or to taste)

Long beans resemble French beans, but are three or four times the length, and are a favourite in India and South-east Asia. They are tender when light green, and firm, but are past their best when they start to turn yellow. In England, Chinese and Indian supermarkets stock long beans in season, but if they are unavailable French beans may be substituted. Here the traditional method of braising and steaming the vegetables is used.

1. Wash the long beans and cut them into 1-inch (2.5-cm) lengths. Peel the onion and chop coarsely.

2. Fry the onion in 2 tsp (10 ml) oil until soft. Then add the long beans. Add the salt, turmeric and chilli powder. Cover the pan and cook over a low heat for 10 minutes, gradually adding 4 tbsp (60 ml) water. The beans should be tender but not over-soft.

Jiji's beans

1 small onion
8 oz (225 g) French beans
ghee
½ tsp cumin seeds
¼ pint (150 ml) milk
2 tbsp (30 ml) plain yogurt
½ tsp chilli powder
¼ tsp turmeric
pinch salt
1 tsp ground coriander

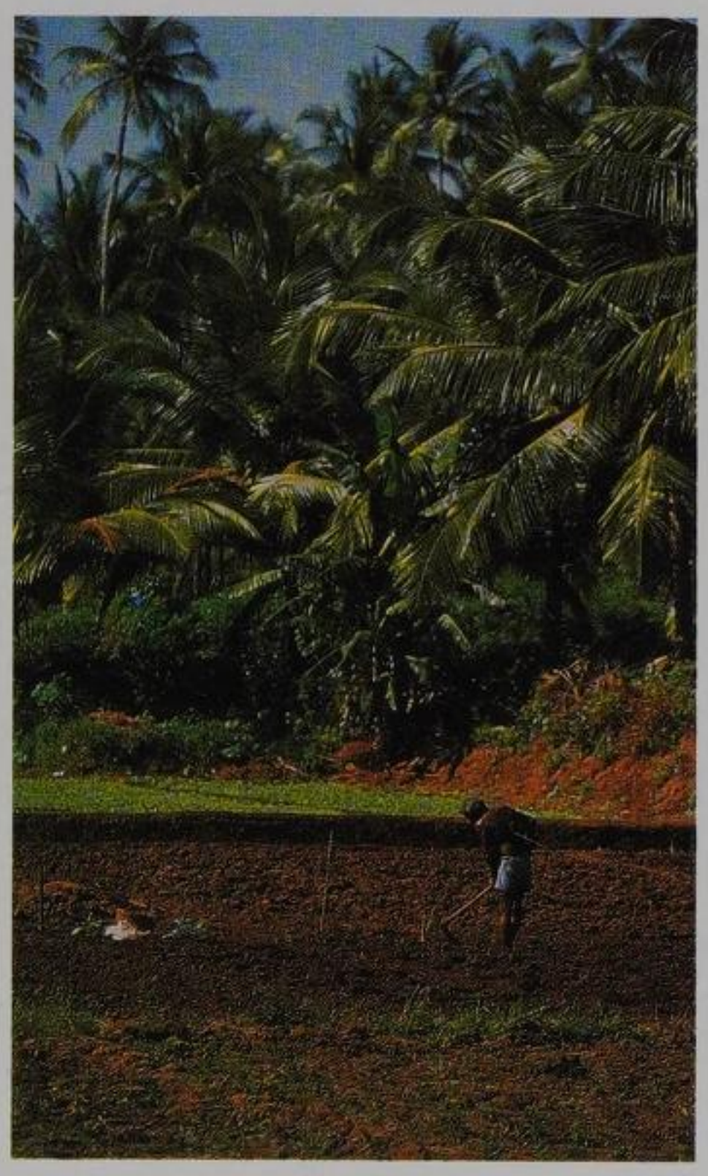
This dish is from Pondicherry, near Madras, where the French East India Company was based, and was taught to me by my sister. Whereas most Tamilians use coconut milk for sauces, Tamilians in this region prefer fresh milk and yogurt in their sauces – influenced perhaps by the cream-based sauces so loved by the French. This recipe uses dwarf, or French, beans, which are mainly grown around Pondicherry – perhaps another legacy of the French.

1. Peel the onion. Cut in half and slice finely into half-rings. Slice the beans in half lengthwise.

2. Heat 2 tsp (10 g) ghee in a large, heavy pan over a medium heat. Add the cumin seeds and fry lightly. Add the milk, then gradually mix in the yogurt and whisk gently.

3. Add the chilli powder, turmeric and salt. Simmer for 5 minutes.

4. Add the ground coriander, the beans and the onions. Cover and simmer for 5 minutes, then add 2 tbsp (30 ml) hot water. Cover again and cook for a further 5–10 minutes until the beans and onions are just soft (or to taste).



Working the land

Drumsticks

MAMMALAM MURUNGAKAI

1 oz (30 g) tamarind
4 tender drumsticks
1 medium onion
¼ inch (6 mm) fresh ginger
1 clove garlic
ghee or oil
1 tsp mustard seeds
½ tsp turmeric
2 tomatoes
1 tsp light brown sugar
¼ tsp salt (or to taste)

When I came to England and asked for drumsticks at a greengrocers I was amazed to be sent to the butchers for them! Drumsticks as I knew them are a vegetable, similar to long green beans, but often a foot long – they are now available in this country in some Indian stores. They are often an ingredient of sambar *(see p. 122) or are enjoyed in their own right, as here. The flavour is quite close to that of asparagus – but they grow on trees native to south India (the trees have tasty, edible leaves that resemble spinach in flavour).*

Most drumsticks will need to have stringy parts of their skins removed before cooking.

The best way to eat this dish is by picking up the drumstick pieces as if they were asparagus, eating the best bits and discarding anything tough.

1. Infuse the tamarind in 4 tbsp (60 ml) hot water for 5 minutes. Strain and put the liquid aside.

2. Wash the drumsticks. Top and tail them. Cut them into 3-inch (8-cm) lengths. De-string with a sharp knife if necessary. Boil them in a few tablespoons of water until tender.

3. Peel and chop the onion. Peel and crush the ginger and the garlic. Roughly chop the tomatoes.

4. In a saucepan melt 1 tsp (5 g) ghee and fry the onion and the mustard seeds together. When the mustard seeds pop add the crushed ginger and garlic. Add the tomatoes and turmeric. Fry, uncovered, over a low heat until the mixture is simmering.

5. Add the drumsticks and brown sugar, salt to taste, and mix well. Cover the pan, reduce the heat and cook until the drumsticks are slightly brown, then add the strained tamarind juice.

6. Cover and cook over a low heat until the drumsticks are soft (about 15–20 minutes).

Serrated gourd with prawns

PEDUCHERRI PERKANKAI

2–3 serrated gourds (about 1 lb (450 g) in weight)
1 medium onion
ghee
2 oz (55 g) shelled cooked prawns
1 tsp black mustard seeds

This is one of my favourite vegetables – not only because it is one of the easiest vegetables to prepare, but because of its sweet and delicate flavour. As its name implies, the serrated gourd has a ridged, rough skin, but is tender inside. This pale green vegetable is available from Indian and Chinese supermarkets.

Tamil women are said to resemble the serrated gourd – slightly sharp with strangers, yet soft and sweet with their loved ones!

With the prawns, this dish is a wonderful combination of textures and flavours, of lusciousness and delicacy.

1. Wash the gourds, then peel away the hard, ridged parts of the skin, leaving the softer strips intact. Slice into rings about ⅛ inch (3 mm) thick. Peel the onion and chop coarsely.

2. In 1 tsp (5 g) ghee fry the onions until soft but not brown. Add the black mustard seeds. When they pop add the prawns and fry for 2–5 minutes, depending on their size.

3. Finally add the sliced gourd, cover the pan and cook for a further 5 minutes. Serve hot.

Crisp-fried bitter gourd

BANDAPUR PARVAKAI

2–3 bitter gourds
½ tsp chilli powder
salt to taste
1 tsp sugar
oil for frying

This dish lives up to its name, the orange flesh of the bitter gourd being very bitter indeed, and definitely an acquired taste. Tamilian men generally prefer the bitter gourd to the sweeter, serrated gourd preferred by women. However, since Tamilians believe that you should not end the day with bitterness – and this includes food – this

dish is never eaten at night. Bitter gourd is available from Indian shops (its Hindi name is kareli).

1. Wash the gourds and cut into ¼-inch (6-mm) slices. Cover them evenly with the chilli powder, salt and sugar and leave to marinate for at least 30 minutes.
2. Heat 2 tsp (10 ml) oil and fry the gourds, a few at a time, until crisp (about 5 minutes). Drain on kitchen paper and serve hot.

Marrow in tamarind

CHIDDAMBARAM AMBAT

1 lb (450 g) marrow (2–3 young marrows)
1½ medium onions
1 or 2 tomatoes
½ oz (15 g) tamarind
ghee for frying
1 tsp chilli powder
½ tsp turmeric
salt to taste
1 tsp fresh ground black pepper
1 tsp black mustard seeds

Young marrows picked early in the season are best for this dish, being sweeter, and their flavour is enhanced by the slight tartness of the tamarind. If you use older marrows, you'll need to discard the pulpy centre and just use the firm flesh.

1. Wash and peel the marrows, then cut them into 1-inch (2.5-cm) cubes. Peel and slice the onions. Wash and chop the tomatoes.
2. Infuse the tamarind in ¼ pint (150 ml) boiling water for 5 minutes. Strain, and put the liquid to one side.
3. Heat 1 tbsp (15 g) ghee and fry the onions until soft. Add the chilli powder, turmeric, salt, black pepper and mustard seeds. Fry for 5 minutes or until browned and the mustard seeds have popped. Then add the tomatoes and diced marrow. Cover and cook over a low heat for 10 minutes, shaking the pan from time to time.
4. Add the tamarind liquid. Continue to cook, uncovered, until the marrow is nearly dry, then serve.

Broccoli with dried prawns

RAMESWARAM KARAMANA UPKARI

2 oz (55 g) dried prawns
1 lb (450 g) broccoli
4 shallots
1 dried red chilli
2 fresh green chillies
groundnut or grapeseed oil
¼ tsp salt (or to taste)
1 tsp black mustard seeds

This is one of the dishes which individual Tamil women have varied in their own ways over the centuries, making use of different green vegetables. It can also be made with spring greens, leeks, or broad beans. Broccoli is unavailable in Madras, but I have chosen it for my variation of the dish as it combines so well with the prawns. The chilli adds a little extra interest. This is an excellent accompaniment to a simple meat or fish dish. Dried prawns are available from Indian and Chinese foodstores.

1. Wash the dried prawns. Leave to drain.

2. Cut the broccoli into small florets.

3. Peel and quarter the shallots. De-seed and slice the fresh green chillies. Cut the dried red chilli into quarters.

4. Grind or finely chop the shallots, dried red chilli and fresh green chillies in a food processor (or chop very finely, then grind in a pestle and mortar).

5. Heat 2 tsp (10 ml) oil in a wok. Add the mustard seeds and fry until they pop. Then add the shallot mixture and dried prawns, and fry until an aroma arises. Finally add the broccoli florets and 1 tbsp (15 ml) water, cover the pan and simmer for 8–10 minutes or until the broccoli is just softened and the prawns are crisp.

Madras spinach

PALANKA KEERAI USAL

Many Tamil women subsidise the family income to help pay for a good education for their children – they grow leafy vegetables around their homes and sell their wares by carrying them in woven baskets on their heads around Madras.

1 lb (450 g) spinach
1 medium onion
ghee
1 tsp black mustard seeds
salt to taste

Spinach grows well in Madras, as it does in England. It is a versatile vegetable that goes well with just about everything. This recipe is mild, and very simple and quick to prepare.

1. Wash the spinach and drain thoroughly. Remove any tough stalks and cut or tear the leaves into ½-inch (1.5-cm) strips. Peel and chop the onion.

2. Melt 1 tsp (5 g) ghee over a low heat and fry the onions until soft.

3. Add the black mustard seeds. When they pop add the spinach. Salt to taste. Cover and cook for about 2–3 minutes, until the spinach is soft and still a good colour.

Cabbage with mustard seeds and onion

PALASANI ZUNAKA

¼ firm white cabbage
1 medium onion
1 green chilli
1 tbsp mustard seeds
salt to taste
oil

The enormous, crisp and hard white cabbages, grown in the Ootacamund area, are popular with housewives in Madras, being full of flavour as well as economical. Cabbage cooked according to this simple recipe is delicious, and retains some of its crisp texture. The mustard seeds add a little sweetness. It is ideal when served with a more powerful or fiery dish.

1. Wash the cabbage and slice it thinly.

2. Peel the onion, halve it and slice thinly into half-rings. De-seed and finely slice the green chilli.

3. Fry the onion in 1 tbsp (15 ml) oil until soft but not browned. Add the mustard seeds and cook until they pop.

4. Add the chilli and cabbage, with 1 tbsp (15 ml) water and salt.

5. Cover the pan and cook for about 6 minutes, or until the cabbage is just soft. Serve hot.

Bean sprouts and celery with cockles

PORT BLAIR ISTHAMANA KAI KOOTU

1 clove garlic
2--3 green chillies
1 red onion
1 stalk celery
8 oz (225 g) bean sprouts
4 oz (110 g) fresh cockles, in shells
groundnut or grapeseed oil
1 tsp black mustard seeds
salt to taste

This delicious vegetable dish with a taste of the sea comes from the Andaman Islands, where seafood is fresh and plentiful. When my grandfather (who was a chaplain in the army and was stationed for a while in the Andaman Islands) invited British officers and soldiers to a meal of cockles, mussels and prawns, they would entertain him in turn by singing the well-known song Molly Malone: 'cockles and mussels alive alive-o!' This is a simple dish to prepare: fresh cockles will give the best results, though canned or bottled cockles may also be used.

1. Peel and crush the garlic. De-seed and slice the chillies. Peel and slice the onion. Slice the celery finely.

2. Rinse the bean sprouts and leave to drain thoroughly.

3. Prepare the cockles: wash them, then place in a bowl and cover with boiling water. Leave for 5 minutes, then drain. Prise open the shells and scoop out the cockles. Leave to one side.

4. Heat 2 tsp (10 ml) oil in a wok or frying-pan and fry the crushed garlic until brown. Add the black mustard seeds and cook until they pop. Add the sliced onion and fresh red chillies and fry until soft and the onion has browned.

5. Then add the bean sprouts and celery and fry for a minute before adding the fresh cockles. Lower the heat, cover and cook for 10 minutes, until the cockles and vegetables are just soft.

Pumpkin with fenugreek

CHEYNEMPET PUSNIKA

¼ pumpkin (8 oz/225 g)
¼ tsp turmeric
1 small onion
¼ inch (6 mm) fresh ginger
2 green chillies
sprig fresh coriander
garlic
½–1 tsp fenugreek seeds (to taste)
oil for frying
1 oz (30 g) freshly grated coconut (optional)
salt to taste

This dish is a glorious golden yellow, the colour of the tiger, and the colour of the necklace a woman wears as a symbol of marriage. This is my mother's recipe, which I loved as a child, in which the chillies add a little fire and the fenugreek a sweetish, but bitter note.

1. Prepare the pumpkin: scoop out the seeds and pith, then peel and cube the flesh. Parboil it with the turmeric until it begins to soften (5–8 minutes).

2. Peel the onion. Chop coarsely. Peel the ginger and chop roughly (or grate).

3. De-seed the chilli, slice finely. Roughly chop the coriander. Peel and chop the garlic.

4. Fry the fenugreek seeds in 2 tsp (10 ml) oil. Then add the chopped onion, garlic and ginger. Cook until the onion softens.

5. Add the pumpkin (and coconut if you are using it) and salt to taste. Cover the pan and finish cooking over a low heat for 5–10 minutes (stir in the coriander towards the end of cooking). The ingredients will be golden yellow and the pumpkin soft enough to pierce easily with a fork.

Masala potato

KELANGA GHASHASHI

1 lb (450 g) medium potatoes
½ pt (300 ml) water
2 medium onions
½ inch (1.5 cm) fresh ginger
4 cloves garlic
2 fresh green chillies
½ lime
1 tsp sesame seeds
1 tsp oriental poppy seeds
4 stalks of fresh coriander leaves
ghee
¼ tsp turmeric
½ tsp chilli powder
2 tsp ground coriander
salt to taste
½ tsp cumin seeds

Tamilians are a friendly people and company is always welcome, especially during the religious festivals of Diwali, Pongal, Ramadan, Bakrid, Christmas and Easter. This recipe has been a popular one since my grandfather's time. As an army chaplain he was always entertaining British guests – officers and soldiers, as well as missionaries and members of their congregations. All the English visitors enjoyed masala potato, perhaps because it has both a touch of home and of the country they had come to call home. Now that I live in England, I feel much the same way about it. (The best potatoes for this recipe are fairly new, waxy ones.)

1. Wash the potatoes. Boil them (in their skins) in a saucepan of salted water until three-quarters done (time will depend on size). Drain, then peel and dice them.

2. Peel and slice finely the onions, ginger and garlic. De-seed and slice the chillies. Squeeze the juice of half a lime.

3. Heat a heavy-based pan and roast the sesame seeds and poppy seeds until golden – keep them on the move so they don't burn.

4. Grind the fresh green chillies, garlic, ginger and 2 stalks of fresh coriander leaves in a food processor. Leave to one side.

5. Heat 2 tsp (10 g) ghee in a heavy-based saucepan. Fry the onions until soft. Then add the ground ingredients and keep frying over a medium heat until an aroma arises.

6. Next stir in the turmeric, chilli powder, ground coriander and salt to taste. Fry for another 2 minutes before adding the potatoes. Make sure the potatoes are well coated with the ingredients in the pan, then stir in the lime juice.

7. Cook uncovered for another 5 minutes and then add the roasted sesame and poppy seeds and the cumin seeds. Sauté for a further 5 minutes. Serve garnished with the remaining fresh coriander.

FACING PAGE: *Fried small purple aubergines (p. 42); charred capsicums (p. 41); tomato chutney (p. 118); spiced lentils,* dhall *(p. 62); masala potato (p. 56) and chappatis (p. 27).*

Cauliflower and potatoes

THEKKADI KOOTU

4 oz (110 g) new potatoes
½ small cauliflower
1 small onion
¼ inch (6 mm) fresh ginger
1 ripe tomato
ghee or oil
1 tsp cumin seeds
1 tsp black mustard seeds
½ tsp turmeric
salt to taste
1 tsp ground coriander
1 tsp chilli powder
½ tsp tomato purée

There are a number of hill stations in the Nilgiri hills, and they have a cool, refreshing climate. Cauliflower, regarded as a luxury, is grown here throughout the year as the temperatures are ideal. Farmers try to grow their cauliflowers as large as they can and prizes are given to farmers with the whitest and largest cauliflowers.

This dish is particularly suitable as a complement to fiery dishes, as the cauliflower helps to absorb the heat of the spices.

1. Wash the potatoes thoroughly and boil in their skins for 8–10 minutes.

2. Cut the cauliflower into 1½ inch (4 cm) florets (discard the stalk) and boil them for 2 minutes. Drain and set aside.

3. Peel the onion and chop finely. Peel and finely chop or grate the ginger. Coarsely chop the tomato.

4. Heat 1 tbsp (15 g) ghee in a saucepan. Add the cumin seeds and black mustard seeds. Add the onion and fry until golden brown.

5. Stir in the turmeric, salt, ginger, ground coriander and chilli powder. Then add the chopped tomato.

6. Stir-fry until the tomato is soft and the aroma rises.

7. Add the potatoes and cauliflower.

8. Stir-fry carefully the ingredients in the saucepan for a minute, then stir in tomato purée mixed with 2 tbsp (30 ml) water (adjust quantity to taste), to make a sauce. Cover the pan and cook for a further 10 minutes, or until the vegetables are soft.

Fried new potatoes

KODAIKANAL TALASANI

1 lb (450 g) small new potatoes
oil
½ tsp ground black pepper
½ tsp ground nutmeg
¼ tsp ground cinnamon
¼ tsp chilli powder
½ tsp ground cumin
¼ tsp ground cloves
salt to taste

Warm temperatures in Madras mean that new potatoes are available all year round, though there are fewer varieties than in the West.

Here the spiced new potatoes are fried until crisp and delicious.

1. Wash the new potatoes thoroughly. Parboil in their skins. Halve any large potatoes.

2. Fry the spices in 2 tbsp (30 ml) oil over a low flame, until the aromas are released.

3. Add the potatoes and coat them with the spices in the frying pan. Salt to taste

4. Fry the potatoes for 8–10 minutes (test with a fork to make sure they are soft inside). The potatoes will have lovely crisp skins.

PRIMET HIGH SCHOOL
DENT STREET, COLNE

Hot and spicy mashed potatoes

NUNDIGROG KELANGA

1 lb (450 g) old potatoes
1 medium onion
2 green chillies
½ oz (15 g) tamarind
oil
1 tsp black mustard seeds
¼ tsp fenugreek seeds
1 tsp coriander seeds
1 tsp salt
¼ tsp turmeric

Throughout the Raj period, potatoes were grown in the hills of Tamil Nadu, and Tamilian cooks employed by the army could not resist spicing up the mashed potato they prepared. Potato cooked this way is traditionally eaten with pooris (p. 30) – it also makes an excellent accompaniment to English-style cold roasts.

1. Peel the potatoes. Boil them in salted water until soft, then mash them (without adding liquid).

2. Peel the onion and chop coarsely. De-seed and finely chop the chillies. Infuse the tamarind in 3 tbsp (45 ml) boiling water for 5 minutes, then strain the liquid and put aside.

3. Heat 1 tbsp (15 ml) oil in a pan, and add the black mustard seeds. Cook until they pop, then add the fenugreek seeds and coriander seeds, and cook until they brown slightly.

4. Add the onion, green chilli and turmeric, and fry until soft and brown. Pour in the tamarind juice and simmer for 5 minutes. Finally stir in the mashed potato and add salt to taste. Cover the pan and cook gently for a further 5 minutes. Serve hot.

Carrots with aniseed

COIMBATORE KOCHHOLI

8 oz (225 g) new-season carrots
2 medium onions
2 ripe tomatoes
1 tsp aniseed
ghee
1 tsp black mustard seeds
¼ tsp turmeric
½ tsp chilli powder
1 tsp salt
fresh dill
2 stalks of fresh coriander

A Tamil housewife always has to be prepared, like the Scouts. In many Tamilian homes it is always open house: a colleague, friend or relative who calls in unexpectedly is always invited to join the family dinner. A Tamil woman learns the art of making a meal stretch for unexpected visitors very early on, and as carrots are cheap a housewife always keeps a few in her vegetable basket for such emergencies.

In this recipe the colour of the carrots is enhanced with tomatoes, and the aniseed adds its own special flavour.

(This recipe also works well with parsnips; we have no parsnips in Madras, but they resemble a type of green carrot that is often prepared in this way.)

1. Peel and finely dice the carrots (¼-inch/6-mm cubes). Peel and slice the onions coarsely. Quarter the tomatoes.

2. Lightly crush the aniseed in a pestle and mortar. Heat 2 tsp (10 g) ghee in a small wok or saucepan and add the mustard seeds and aniseed. When the mustard seeds pop add the onion and fry until golden brown.

3. Add the turmeric, chilli powder and salt and fry for about 2 minutes. When an aroma arises, add the tomatoes. Lower the heat and cook, stirring frequently, until the tomatoes are soft. Add the carrots

and 2 tbsp (30 ml) water. Cover the pan tightly and cook over a low heat until the carrots become tender (10–15 minutes). Serve garnished with the fresh dill and coriander.

Malar's root vegetables in hot tamarind sauce

MALAR'S SUKKEE

5 shallots
2 cloves garlic
2 fresh red chillies
¼ swede
1 medium carrot
1 small parsnip
3 small potatoes
2 tomatoes
1 oz (30 g) tamarind
2 tsp brown sugar
oil
¼ tsp turmeric
½ tsp chilli powder
1 tsp ground coriander
salt to taste

I was first introduced to vegetable swedes by my English friends. The children made them into lanterns to raise money for charity, and my friends showed me how to make a delicious warming winter stew with the scooped out swede chunks combined with parsnips, carrots and potatoes. In return, I showed them this Tamilian dish, which uses root vegetables in a spicy but sweet tamarind sauce, giving the same, very English ingredients an unusual Tamilian flavour (in Madras, crimson yam is used, rather than swede). It is as warming as the friendship I have shared with English people.

1. Peel the shallots and chop coarsely. Peel the garlic. Wash and de-seed the fresh red chillies. Grind or mince the shallots, garlic and chillies together in a pestle and mortar or food processor. Leave aside.

2. Peel the swede, carrots, parsnip and potatoes. Quarter the tomatoes.

3. Infuse the tamarind in ½ pint (300 ml) boiling water for 5 minutes and strain. Add the brown sugar, mix well and put to one side.

4. Heat 1 tbsp (15 ml) oil in a heavy-based saucepan and fry the ground onion mixture with the turmeric, chilli powder, ground coriander, and salt. Stir in the prepared vegetables and coat them with the ground ingredients. Then add the tamarind juice and tomatoes. Bring to the boil. Lower the heat immediately, cover the pan and cook until all the vegetables are soft (15–20 minutes).

Spiced lentils

DHALL (THUVARAI PARPU)

1 clove garlic

1 medium onion

1 cup (8 fl oz or 250 ml) split red grams (shelled toor dhall) or red lentils (masoor dhall)

2 cups (16 fl oz or 500 ml) hot water

1 tsp salt (or to taste)

1 tsp turmeric

oil

1 tsp black mustard seeds

Dhall *(the Hindi word;* parpu *is Tamil) denotes not only the dry split peas or lentils but also a cooked preparation which, in its many varieties, is eaten all over the sub-continent. Dhall forms an important part of the diet, especially for vegetarians. A staple of the Brahmins, pulses, or grams, are considered a very pure food, and their purity is enhanced by the fact that they grow above ground, and are blown by the wind. Grams are an excellent source of protein, and are quite delicious – in India they are cooked with age-old skills which make them substantial yet fragrant. Split red grams (shelled toor dhall) may be used, which in this recipe needs to be soaked for an hour before cooking, or red lentils (masoor dhall). The former are usually preferred in Tamil Nadu. Dhall is cooked to many consistencies varying from thick to quite liquid, according to taste – the quantities below will give a fairly thick consistency.*

Here the mustard seeds add a touch of sweetness; red capsicums could be added for more colour.

1. If using toor dhall, soak in water for 2 hours before use.

2. Peel the garlic and slightly crush the clove with a pestle or the flat of a knife blade. Peel the onion and chop finely.

3. Wash the grams or lentils thoroughly and place in a large pan or pressure cooker with the hot water.

4. Add salt, turmeric and the crushed garlic. Bring to the boil.

5. Reduce the heat and simmer (half-covered, so the pan doesn't boil over) until the lentils are soft (10 minutes for red lentils, 30 minutes for toor dhall).

6. Fry the onion, over low heat, in 1 tsp (5 ml) oil until soft and brown. Add the mustard seeds and cook until they pop.

7. Add the onions to the soft lentils and cook for a further 5–10 minutes.

Indians are proud of their national identity, and the colours of the Indian national flag can be seen in an average Indian meal; orange in parpu, green in a leafy vegetable and white in rice.

Nilgiris salad

NILGIRIS PACHADI

1 medium carrot
½ crisp white cabbage
1 small onion
½ red capsicum
½ green capsicum
½ cucumber
1 oz (30 g) green grapes
1 oz (30 g) black grapes
4 oz (110 g) strawberries, when available
2 peaches
2 satsumas
1 small apple
1 oz (30 g) sunflower seeds
1 oz (30 g) chopped walnuts
2 firm tomatoes
4 tbsp (60 ml) natural yogurt
sprig fresh coriander

Salads are not a traditional part of Tamil cuisine, so there are no specific Tamilian recipes. However, salads have been a favourite in my family since the days of my grandfather, who travelled to England at a time when few Tamilians came here. According to family legend, he loved a good salad! I have created this delicious and colourful dish of fruit, nuts and vegetables – with its own special blend of yogurt and coriander to give it a Tamilian touch – and have named it after the beautiful Nilgiri hills. I serve it with biryani on special occasions, and it always proves a popular complement to the richness of the biryani. The crunchiness of the nuts and sunflower seeds makes a delightful contrast to the juicy fruit and crisp vegetables.

1. Grate the carrot finely. Finely slice the cabbage and onion.

2. Cut the red and green capsicums and cucumber into small cubes.

3. Halve the grapes and strawberries. Peel and slice the peaches.

4. Quarter the segments of the satsumas. Peel and slice the apple.

5. Place all the above ingredients in a bowl and add the sunflower seeds and walnuts. Gently stir in the yogurt and add the chopped fresh coriander.

FISH AND SEAFOOD

Many Tamilians look to the sea for their livelihood, as they did in ages past, and it is wonderful to hear fishermen chanting ancient songs of the sea as they row their boats along the shore. Tamilians have a rich profusion of fresh fish and seafood right on their doorstep, both from the seas that wash the coasts and from the five large, well stocked rivers. Fish from Madras is now exported all over the world – I have bought prawns from my local fishmonger in England that had come from Madras – fishing is an important part of the Madras economy.

Fish is considered a food 'for the brain', and is eaten by all, including some Brahmins, whose diet is otherwise vegetarian.

The wealth of seafood includes delicious crabs – the small blue-coloured crabs are from the sea, and the large black crabs are freshwater – packed with firm, sweet flesh; there are juicy cockles, mussels and shrimps; plump prawns (large, blue-veined, tiger and pink) and glorious lobsters. Among the fish are Spanish mackerel, pomfret, shark, grouper, Malabar sole, whitebait, pilchards, shark and swordfish. In the city of Madras you can go down to the Marina shore, one of the longest beaches in the world, to buy tiger prawns and fish straight from the fishermen's boats.

FACING PAGE: *Marina prawns (p. 67); drumsticks with tamarind (p. 49) and rice with fresh lime (p. 15).*

Women from fishing families take baskets of fish, carrying them on their heads or on their hips, to sell to the housewife. Other fish are sold in markets, where they are wrapped in fresh mandera palm leaves for the customer to take home.

Seafood and fish are invariably sold extremely fresh, since the high temperatures make storage for any length of time impossible. Fish or shrimps not sold on the day they are caught are salted and treated, then sold for use in pickles and pastes. Bammalo are dried and nicknamed 'Bombay duck'. Tamilians have always eaten salted fish, and the West is now acquiring a taste for it too.

The enormous variety of fish and seafood, combined with the imagination of Tamilian cooks, has produced a fascinating and tempting range of dishes. Fish such as pomfret may be simply fried; others, such as Spanish mackerel, might be baked in a clay pot, in tamarind or coconut sauce; pieces of grouper may be wrapped in banana leaf and baked in hot ashes. Shark or *valai* might be flaked and made into cutlets, while very delicate fish are steamed. Crabs are cooked in hot tamarind sauce, and both crabs and lobsters are wrapped in banana leaves and baked in hot ashes, bringing their full flavours to the fore. The sweetness of succulent prawns is brought out by cooking them in coconut or tomato.

Fish and seafood are generally considered light and sweet, and leave a sense of freshness after a meal. But fish prepared with tamarind – a harmony of sweet, spicy, and fruity flavours with a little contrast of sourness – is wonderful. I invite you to try these flavours of Madras.

The best prawns for these recipes are tiger or king prawns (usually available uncooked) though any prawns can be used, raw or cooked, fresh or frozen.

To peel prawns, break off the head and tail, then peel off the shell. If they are uncooked, de-thread them by making a slit in the back of the shelled prawn and removing the black thread.

Frozen prawns have sometimes been salted, in which case they will benefit from being thawed then thoroughly rinsed before cooking.

The cooking time required will vary a lot depending on the size of the prawns, and on whether they were pre-cooked.

Marina prawns

PUKSHAN ODAI MARINA ERRA KUTTA

1 lb (450 g) shelled prawns
salt
¼ tsp turmeric
1 tsp chilli powder
salt to taste
2 cloves garlic
¼ inch (6 mm) fresh ginger
2 tomatoes
2 small onions
oil
1 tsp black mustard seeds

Along the shores of Madras the fishermen sell their king prawns fresh from the ocean. Women in the city of Madras go down to the vast Marina beach to buy the fresh catch. The flavour of this dish always takes me back to that beautiful tropical coast.

1. Season the prawns with the salt, turmeric, chilli powder and salt.
2. Peel and crush or grate the garlic and ginger.
3. Roughly chop the tomatoes.
4. Peel the onions and slice finely into rings. Heat 1 tbsp (15 ml) oil and gently fry the onions until soft, then add the black mustard seeds.
5. When the mustard seeds pop, add the spiced prawns. Stir the mixture until the prawns are well coated.
6. Add the crushed ginger and garlic, then the tomatoes. Reduce the heat and cook for 5–10 minutes.

Marriages were arranged for Tamil girls and it is still the practice today. It is a long process. Photos of the potential partners are shown and if either party is interested they agree to visit the bride and her family. The Tamil girl is brought out by her mother or sister for the bridegroom and his family to observe her stature and conduct and after a few minutes she retires to her room. If the prospective groom and his family like the young maiden they are invited back again and sometimes enjoy a meal. One of the many dishes that are served to them is this prawn dish, and as the saying goes 'The way to a man's heart is through his stomach'.

Andaman prawn curry

ANDAMAN ERRA KUTTA

2 medium onions
2 cloves garlic
1 green chilli
1 oz (30 g) tamarind
oil
1 or 2 neem leaves
1 tsp black peppercorns
2 tsp black mustard seeds
2 tsp cumin seeds
4 tbsp (60 ml) thick coconut milk (see glossary)
1 tsp chilli powder
½ tsp turmeric
salt to taste
1 lb (450 g) shelled prawns

The Andaman Islands are officially part of the state of Tamil Nadu, though they are out in the Indian Ocean. These islands are the home of exotic orchids, water lilies, peacocks and flamingoes, and the warm crystal waters supply a variety of seafood. These days most of the prawns caught here are exported to Western countries.

In this recipe from the Andamans the prawns are cooked in a creamy coconut sauce that has a little chilli fire and a touch of cooling tamarind.

1. Peel the onions and chop finely. Peel the garlic and chop finely. De-seed the chilli and slice lengthwise.

2. Infuse the tamarind in 4 tbsp (60 ml) hot water for 5 minutes, strain and put the liquid to one side.

3. Heat 1 tbsp (15 ml) oil in a pan. Fry the neem leaves for a minute, then add the chopped onions, garlic and the peppercorns. Fry until the onions and garlic are soft. Then add the mustard and cumin seeds.

4. Mix in the tamarind juice, coconut milk, chilli powder, turmeric, salt and sliced green chilli. Simmer covered for 10 minutes.

5. Add the prawns and simmer gently until they are cooked (3–10 minutes, depending on size of prawns and whether they were pre-cooked), then serve with rice.

Fried prawns

CAUVERY ERRA PORIYAL

1 lb (450 g) shelled prawns
1 tsp chilli powder
¼ tsp turmeric
¼ tsp salt
1 medium onion
oil

Tamilians sometimes like to start a meal with a sweetish flavour. Prawns are a rich, sweet seafood and, fried with spices and onion rings, make an ideal starter to a traditional Tamil meal, and truly 'tempt the appetite.

1. Prepare the prawns. Sprinkle evenly with the chilli, turmeric and salt, and marinate for at least half an hour.

2. Peel the onion and slice into ⅛-inch (3-mm) rings.

3. Heat 2 tbsp (60 ml) oil in a shallow pan or wok until it smokes slightly.

4. Fry the marinated prawns and the onion rings in the oil until brown and crispy. Drain on kitchen paper, then serve immediately.

When prawns are still in their shells the quantity looks far greater than afterwards, especially if they have shrunk in cooking. The custom in India is for wives generally to eat after their husbands, so wives avoid letting their husbands see the prawns until they are shelled – otherwise, comparing the small quantity of prepared ones with the heap they had seen earlier, the men would surely think their womenfolk had misbehaved, and had already eaten their share. Just in case, Madras women only ever shell prawns while their husbands are out of the house!

Crab in chilli with tamarind

PULIKAT NANDA

1 oz (30 g) tamarind
8–10 crab claws
½ inch (1.5 cm) fresh ginger
6–8 dried chillies
oil
1 medium onion
5 cloves garlic
¼ tsp salt (or to taste)
1 tsp brown sugar
½ tsp cumin seed

Black river crabs, which are bigger and sweeter than sea crabs, are traditionally used for this dish. In the West, crab claws make a good substitute. It is a bit fiddly to eat crab, so many Tamilian cooks remove the flesh from the shell before serving their family or guests. Crab claws weighing about 1½ oz (45 g) each will give enough meat for this dish.

1. Infuse the tamarind in 4 tbsp (60 ml) hot water for 5 minutes. Strain and leave the juice aside, retaining the pulp to use again later.

2. Wash the crab claws. With a mallet, crack the shell of each one. Do not remove the shells, but soak the whole crab claws in the tamarind juice for an hour.

3. Peel the ginger. De-seed the chillies. Chop finely and grind together in a pestle and mortar. Peel and slice the onion into thin rings. Peel the garlic and chop finely.

4. Remove the crab claws from the tamarind marinade (reserve the marinade).

5. Heat 2 tsp (10 ml) oil in a pan and fry the ground ingredients until fragrant then add the onion and fry until soft and golden brown.

6. Add the crab claws with the salt and sugar. Pour in the remaining tamarind marinade, then add cumin seeds and garlic. Cover the pan. Simmer gently for about 10 minutes, until the small quantity of sauce has thickened. Serve the crab claws whole, or remove the crabmeat from the shells before serving, and stir the crabmeat into the sauce.

Thambis crabs

THAMBI ODAI NANDA KUTTU

1–2 female crabs
1 medium onion
2 cloves garlic
1 green chilli
1 tomato
1 oz (30 g) tamarind
1 tsp cumin seeds
oil
¼ tsp turmeric
2 tsp chilli powder
1 tbsp (15 ml) tomato purée
salt
3–4 spring onions
sprig fresh coriander

I have helped my mother to prepare this recipe many times, since crabs are my brothers' favourite dish (thambis *means 'brother', so I have named it after them). At the festival of Raksha Bandhan in July, girls pay particular attention to their brothers. They prepare special dishes – of which this is one – and the boys are made to feel like princes for the day.*

You need patience to prise the sweet, spicy flesh away from the shells, but the result is delicious and well worth the struggle! Freshwater crabs are best, being sweeter than sea crabs. They are unavailable in England, but a fresh English crab will do nicely.

Use one large (3–3½ lb/1.5 kg) crab, or 2 small (about 2 lb/1 kg) crabs (8–10 crab claws could be used instead).

1. Prepare the crabs by removing the shell and the gills. Break off the large claws, then remove the small legs and scrape away any hairs with a knife. Divide each body into quarters.

2. Peel the onion and slice into rings. Peel and crush the garlic. De-seed the chilli and slice lengthwise. Roughly chop the tomato.

3. Infuse the tamarind in 2 tbsp (30 ml) boiling water for 5 minutes, then strain, squeezing the pulp, making a thick tamarind sauce.

4. Fry the cumin seeds and the sliced onion in 2 tsp (10 ml) oil until soft, then remove from the heat and add the turmeric and chilli powder. Return to the heat, add the tomato purée, and cook until there is an aroma.

5. Add the prepared crab, green chilli, garlic, salt to taste and chopped tomato. Lower the heat and cover the pan.

6. Cook slowly, stirring well for 2–3 minutes, then stir in the thick tamarind sauce. Cook gently for 15–20 minutes. Remove from the pan and garnish with chopped spring onions and coriander leaves.

PRIMET HIGH SCHOOL
DENT STREET, COLNE

Masala lobsters

MAMMALAPURAM KAL ERRA

1–2 fresh lobsters (1 lb/450 g), boiled
1 inch (2.5 cm) fresh ginger
2 fresh green chillies
4 tsp black mustard seeds
¼ tsp turmeric
½ tsp chilli powder
salt to taste
1 tsp aniseed
1 tsp fenugreek seeds
1 tsp cumin seeds
grapeseed oil
2 tender banana leaves or 2 stalks of fresh coriander leaves and foil

Baked lobsters with spices, wrapped in banana leaves, and baked in smouldering coals is delicious. If banana leaves cannot be found, foil will do – you will still achieve a mouth-watering result! The lobsters can be cooked over a cooling barbecue, or in an oven.

1. Remove the lobster from the shell: remove the head and tail, prise the lobster shell away from the flesh.

2. Peel and slice the ginger. De-seed and slice the fresh chillies. Grind 3 tsp of the mustard seeds, ginger and chilli to a very fine paste in a pestle and mortar, or in the small bowl of a food processor. Place in a bowl and add turmeric, chilli powder and salt.

3. In a coffee grinder, or pestle and mortar, grind together the aniseed, fenugreek, cumin and remaining teaspoon of mustard seeds.

4. Heat 1 tbsp (15 ml) oil and add the ground seeds. Fry briefly, pour over the ginger and chilli paste, and mix well.

5. Liberally coat the lobsters with this paste, wrap in banana leaves (or wrap, together with a sprig of coriander, in foil). Place on a baking tray and bake in a moderately hot oven (190°C/375°F, gas mark 5), or in the coals of a barbecue, for 20–30 minutes, depending on size. Serve.

This is a very special dish, which often forms part of the meal of the bridal party the night before a wedding. There is much laughter, teasing and a few tears throughout the day among the bride and her happy young sisters and friends. In the evening the mother offers prayers in the home, followed by a feast of deliciously prepared dishes, such as this, which they all share.

FACING PAGE: *Serrated gourd with prawns (p. 50); fish in tamarind sauce (p. 75) and simple rice (p. 14).*

Madurai mussels

MADURAI KILANJAL

2 lb (1 kg) mussels, in shells
½ tsp turmeric
3 fresh red chillies
1 inch (2.5 cm) fresh ginger
3 cloves garlic
2 cloves
1 oz (30 g) tamarind
3 small onions
groundnut or grapeseed oil
1 tsp fenugreek seeds
¼ pint (150 ml) thin coconut milk (see glossary)
salt

The ancient city of Madurai was home to the Pandya kings over a thousand years ago. They built some of most dramatic gopurams *in Tamil Nadu, soaring Hindu temples with exquisite carving.*

The combination of spices and coconut in this recipe bring out the full flavour of the sea-fresh mussels, making a fragrant sauce. Mussels, eaten with the fingers in Madras, are served with rice. (The mussel shells are rubbed with spices that can sting – it is best to wear rubber gloves.) Remember to discard any mussels that do not rise to the surface of a bowl of water.

1. Scrub the mussels; remove the beards. Rub turmeric over the shells; set aside.

2. De-seed two of the fresh red chillies, chop finely. Peel and slice the ginger and garlic. Grind the chopped red chillies, cloves, garlic and ginger to a fine paste in a pestle and mortar, or food processor with a small bowl. Rub the paste over the turmeric-covered mussel shells; set aside for an hour.

3. Infuse the tamarind in 4 tbsp (60 ml) hot water for 5 minutes. Strain and leave the liquid to one side. Peel the onions; chop finely.

4. Heat 1 tbsp (15 ml) oil in a large saucepan or wok over medium heat. Fry the fenugreek seeds until golden brown. Then add half the chopped onion and cook until brown and soft. Put in the marinated mussels and continue to fry for 5–6 minutes, stirring occasionally. Lower the heat.

5. Stir in the coconut milk and tamarind liquid. Add salt to taste. Then add the remaining onions. Mix well. Cover and cook for 5–10 minutes, stirring occasionally. When the shells begin to open, taste and add more salt if necessary. Once the shells are open the mussels are cooked.

6. Place the mussels in a large serving bowl (discard any that have not opened). Garnish with the remaining red chilli.

Fish in tamarind sauce

RUNGASWAMY MEEN KOLOMBA

2 whole mackerel, mullet or trout, or 1 lb (450 g) monkfish, cod, or other firm-fleshed fish
salt
2 tsp chilli powder
1 tbsp ground coriander
1¼ oz (45 g) tamarind
1 medium onion
2 cloves garlic
2 tomatoes
oil
1 tbsp fenugreek seeds
1 tsp (5 ml) tomato purée
1 oz (30 g) fresh coriander leaves

This delicious masterpiece improves by being kept overnight to allow the fish to absorb the flavour of the sauce (it is quickly reheated). As the tamarind is acidic, it's best to avoid an aluminium pot – traditionally this is made in a clay pot, but stainless steel is often used today.

1. Scale and clean the fish thoroughly. Wash and dry the fish and sprinkle with a little salt. Cut whole fish into 3 or 4 pieces, and fillet into pieces about 2 x 3 inches (5 x 7 cm).

2. Make a paste with the chilli powder, ground coriander and 1 tbsp (15 ml) hot water.

3. Infuse the tamarind in ¾ pint (450 ml) boiling water for 5 minutes, then strain and reserve the liquid.

4. Peel the onion and chop coarsely. Peel the garlic, chop finely. Roughly chop the tomatoes.

5. Fry the garlic and onions in oil until soft. Add the fenugreek seeds and fry them until the aroma is released.

6. Add the chilli and ground coriander paste. Fry for 2 minutes. Then slowly add the tamarind liquid while stirring. Bring to the boil.

7. Add the tomatoes and tomato purée.

8. Boil for about 15 minutes before adding the fish. Lower the heat, cover the pan and simmer for about 10 minutes. Just at the end of cooking add the fresh coriander leaves.

Bright sunshine throughout the day makes it possible for housewives to leave the kitchen doors wide open and do some kitchen work outside: there is always a space for grinding, for cleaning fish, for scouring pots and pans with a coconut husk. Here, the heavy grinding granite stone and the heavy pestle and mortar have pride of place. Until recently, many Tamilians would employ a servant to help with heavy tasks, as labour used to be cheap. Times are changing in modern Madras, however, and labour-saving devices such as food processors and modern cookers mean that many people now manage without extra help.

Monkfish in coconut

MEEN MOLI

1 lb (450 g) monkfish (or other firm-fleshed fish such as cod, halibut or mullet)
½ tsp salt (or to taste)
1 tsp turmeric
3 medium onions
4–5 cloves of garlic
1 inch (2.5 cm) fresh ginger
3 fresh green chillies
half a lemon
2 tomatoes
ghee
6 fl oz (175 ml) thin coconut milk
4 fl oz (125 ml) thick coconut milk (see glossary)
1 tsp light brown sugar

Meen *is Tamil for fish, and* moli *(a name given by the English memsahibs) the sauce – with its wonderful combination of coconut, green chillies and ginger. Anyone who loves fish should try this delicious sweet-yet-fiery dish. Meen moli is a speciality of the restaurants in the ancient city of Madurai, home of many temple festivals, and is enjoyed all round the coasts of south India.*

1. Clean or skin the fish as required, and cut into pieces about 2 inches (5 cm) square. Sprinkle evenly with the salt and turmeric. Marinate for half an hour.

2. Peel the onions. Quarter one of them.

3. Peel the garlic and ginger. De-seed the fresh green chillies. Place the garlic, ginger and chillies in a food processor with the quartered onion, and grind to a fine pulp (not a purée). Or chop very finely and grind in a pestle and mortar.

4. Quarter the remaining onions, then slice finely. Crush them slightly (to help them soften when cooking) in a pestle and mortar or with a rolling pin.

5. Squeeze the juice of half a lemon. Roughly chop the tomatoes.

6. Heat 1 tbsp (15 g) ghee in a frying pan and fry the fish just long enough to seal it. Set it aside. In another pan heat 1 tbsp (15 g) ghee over a low heat, and fry the finely ground onion mixture. When the aroma is released, add the thin coconut milk, and the chopped tomatoes. Bring it to the boil. Then add the fish and the finely sliced onions and cook for another 5 minutes. Lower the heat and let it simmer slowly for 5–10 minutes (depending on how quickly the fish is cooking).

7. Add the lemon juice, thick coconut milk, sugar and salt to taste. Simmer for a further 1–2 minutes. (The fish should be cooked and the sauce should have a creamy, pouring consistency.) Remove from the heat and serve.

FACING PAGE: *Monkfish in coconut; pumpkin with fenugreek (p. 55); mangetout with ginger and chilli (p. 43) and tomato rice (p. 19).*

Fish baked in banana leaves

ENAPPA CHUTTA VANJARAM

1 small onion
2 fresh green chillies
2 tsp black mustard seeds
2 tsp brown sugar
1 lb (450g) mullet or mackerel, filleted
salt to taste
½ tsp turmeric
1 tsp chilli powder
1 oz (30 g) cornflour
1 tbsp (15 ml) mustard oil
1 tsp sesame oil
2 tender banana leaves

Here, mullet or mackerel are marinated in spices, wrapped in banana leaves and baked in hot ashes – ideal for when a summer barbecue is cooling. The banana leaves keep the fish moist and give it a unique and delightful, slightly fruity, flavour. In the absence of either banana leaves or barbecue, the fish may be wrapped in foil and oven-baked.

1. Peel and chop the onion. De-seed and slice the fresh green chillies. Grind together the onion, chillies, mustard seeds and sugar in a food processor (or chop finely and grind in a pestle and mortar). Remove and set aside.

2. Wash and dry the fish. Cut into 2-inch (5-cm) squares. Sprinkle evenly with salt, turmeric and chilli powder. Mix the ground onion mixture with the cornflour, mustard oil and sesame oil, and rub over the fish. Leave the fish to marinate for at least half an hour.

3. Cut the banana leaves into eight (cut lengthwise, then across to make quarters, then halve the quarters). Wash and dry the pieces.

4. Roll a strip of fish in a piece of banana leaf or foil (seal the banana leaf with ghee). Fold over both ends.

5. Bake on a cooling barbecue, or in a moderate oven (180°C/350°F, gas mark 4) for 10–15 minutes (or until the fish is tender).

Banana leaves have many uses. Being clean and moist, they make a good wrapper for fish or meat bought in the market, and, cut into squares, they serve as excellent plates. As they are only used once, they are always considered pure. At the end of a meal each person folds the leaf over, towards themselves, to express gratitude for a meal well served.

Spicy whitebait

APPA ODAI NETHALI

½ oz (15 g) tamarind
1 lb (450 g) whitebait
1 medium-sized onion
2 fresh green chillies
ghee
1 tsp fenugreek seeds
1 tsp (5 ml) tomato purée
salt to taste

This recipe has been in our family for several generations. It was a dish my father particularly liked for its sweetness and delicate spices, and my mother was given the recipe by my paternal grandmother. Whitebait are fragile and you need to treat them gently when cooking to prevent them breaking up.

1. Infuse the tamarind in 2 tbsp (30 ml) hot water for 5 minutes. Strain and set aside.

2. Wash the whitebait.

3. Peel the onion and chop coarsely. De-seed and slice the green chillies. Blend the onions and chillies together in a food processor until a smooth paste is obtained.

4. Heat 2 tbsp (30 g) ghee in a medium-sized saucepan over medium heat. Fry the fenugreek seeds until brown. Add the onion and chilli paste. Next add the tamarind liquid, tomato purée and salt to taste, and bring it to the boil. Finally add the whitebait with 2 tsp (10 ml) cold water. Stir gently and cook for 2 minutes. Shake the saucepan gently to prevent sticking. Remove from the heat and serve with rice and vegetables.

The time when a young Tamil girl reaches maturity is special and Tamilians mark this occasion with a celebration. The young maiden is dressed like one of the famous Meenakshi dolls, in her best sari. Her hair is adorned with flowers and the young maiden sits on a coconut leaf in her room.

According to this ancient custom, this was the time she was viewed as a marriage partner for a lucky young man. For two weeks she is treated like a queen. Special fish dishes are prepared to tempt her appetite. Meenakshi, the Goddess of the Sea, looks down kindly on this young maiden.

Bombay duck with aubergine in tamarind sauce

COOVUM KARVADA KUTTU

2 dried red chillies
1 tsp cumin seeds
½ tsp turmeric
2 tsp ground coriander
2–3 Bombay duck (any salted fish), 8 oz (225 g) in weight
2 small onions
2 cloves garlic
1 green chilli
2 ripe tomatoes
1 oz (30 g) tamarind
2 small (or ½ large) aubergines
oil
salt

'Bombay duck' was originally the nickname for salted bammalo, and now refers to any salt fish. Though Madras is near the coast and fish is caught throughout the year, many fishermen do not go out at the height of the Monsoon season, and for non-meat eaters Bombay duck can be a useful ingredient.

Bombay duck cooked with aubergine in tamarind sauce is delicious, an interesting contrast of textures, and of salt and sweet flavours.

1. De-seed the red chillies and grind them with the cumin seeds in a coffee grinder or pestle and mortar. Mix them with the turmeric, ground coriander and 1 tsp (5 ml) water to make a masala paste. Set aside.

2. Cut the Bombay duck crosswise into ¼-inch (6-mm) strips and soak in water for 20 minutes.

3. Peel the onions and garlic. Chop them coarsely. De-seed and finely slice the green chilli. Roughly chop the tomatoes.

4. Infuse the tamarind in 4 tbsp (60 ml) boiling water for 5 minutes, then strain and put the liquid to one side.

5. Wash the aubergines and dice into ¼-inch (6-mm) cubes.

6. Heat 1 tbsp (15 ml) oil in a pan and fry the onions, garlic and green chilli until soft. Add the masala paste. When the aromas are released add the aubergines, tomatoes and 2 tbsp (30 ml) hot water. Cover and simmer over a low heat until the aubergine is almost tender (about 5 minutes).

7. Finally drain the salted fish and add it to the pan. Then add the tamarind juice. Add salt if required. Cover the pan and cook gently for 5 minutes, until the fish is done and the sauce has thickened a little. Serve hot or cold.

Fried spiced fish

VELLANKANI MASALA MEENA

3 small onions
2 cloves garlic
½ inch (1.5 cm) fresh ginger
2 green chillies
2 small whole fish (1 lb/450 g in total)
salt to taste
½ tsp turmeric
1 tsp sesame seeds
oil
1 lime
fresh coriander leaves

In Madras we use pomfret, which resembles a small plaice, or grouper for this recipe. If you can't get these fish, then small lemon sole, Dover sole or plaice will do just as well. It goes well with fried new potatoes (p. 59).

◆ The fish need to be marinated for at least an hour before cooking.

1. Peel the onions, garlic and ginger, de-seed the chillies. Process to an even pulp in a food processor (or chop finely and crush with a pestle and mortar).

2. Clean and wash the fish, pat dry. Cover evenly with salt, turmeric and the paste, and set aside for an hour.

3. Roast the sesame seeds in a heavy frying-pan, taking care that they do not burn.

4. Shallow-fry the fish in oil until it is crisp. Garnish with roasted sesame seeds, slices of lime and fresh coriander. Serve hot.

Steamed fish with mustard

COONOR SUNTHIYAM

1 lb (450 g) white fish fillets
½ tsp turmeric
½ level tsp chilli powder
salt to taste
1 tbsp black mustard seeds
¼ in (6 mm) fresh ginger
1 fresh green chilli
1 tbsp (15 ml) mustard oil
½ tsp cumin seeds
1 tsp (5 ml) sesame oil

Years ago, in the Nilgiris, a friend invited me to share fish prepared this way. The mustard oil turns the fish a delightful golden yellow colour, and like all Tamilian women I love gold.

◆ The fish needs to marinate for at least an hour before cooking.

1. Wash and dry the fish, cut into 2-inch (5-cm) squares, cover evenly with the turmeric, chilli powder and salt, and marinate for at least an hour.

2. Soak the mustard seeds in a cupful of water for 10 minutes. Peel the ginger. De-seed and finely slice the chilli.

3. Drain the mustard seeds and grind them to a fine paste with the ginger, using a pestle and mortar or small bowl of a food processor.

4. Pour the mustard oil into a heat-proof dish (which will fit in a steamer), then place the fish in the dish. Spread the fish with the mustard paste, cover with the chilli and fresh ginger. Sprinkle with salt and cumin seeds and finally drizzle with the sesame oil.

5. Place the dish in a steamer and simmer for 15–20 minutes (or stand the dish in a large saucepan with 1 inch (2.5 cm) water and cook, tightly covered). The fish will be cooked and there will be a small amount of golden sauce.

Fried fish

MEENAVAR ISTHAMANA SAPPATA

1 lb (450 g) mackerel or other fish
1 tsp chilli powder
¼ tsp turmeric
salt to taste
oil

My mother used to fry a plateful of small Spanish mackerel and serve it, as an appetiser, with cold drinks. This simple but delicious recipe can be applied to all varieties of fish, whether whole or filleted, white or oily.

1. Scale and clean the fish thoroughly. Cut into strips about ½ inch (1.5 cm) wide and 3 inches (8 cm) long. Cover the fish evenly with the chilli, turmeric, and salt and marinate for at least half an hour.

2. Heat 2 tbsp (30 ml) oil in a wok or shallow frying-pan. Test the temperature by dropping in a cube of bread (it should turn brown immediately). Fry the pieces of fish a few at a time, and drain on kitchen paper. Serve warm.

Crispy spiced whitebait

VELLORE NETHALI

½ lb (225 g) whitebait
1 tsp chilli powder
½ tsp turmeric
salt to taste
oil for frying

In Madras whitebait are cheap and popular. This delicious snack goes well with beer or other cold drinks, and can be served as an appetiser, or as a main dish with rice and a green vegetable.

1. Wash the whitebait and pat dry. Sprinkle evenly with the chilli, turmeric, and salt and marinate for 10 minutes.

2. Shallow-fry or deep-fry the whitebait (a wok is ideal) until they are crisp. Drain on kitchen paper and serve warm.

Shark cutlets

KANYA KUMARI SORRA

MAKES ABOUT 20

1 lb (450 g) shark or other suitable fish
½ tsp salt (or to taste)
½ tsp turmeric
1 tsp chilli powder
1 medium onion
2 cloves garlic
½ inch (1.5 cm) fresh ginger
2 green chillies
1 tsp freshly ground black pepper
white of 1 egg
2 tbsp dried (or roasted) breadcrumbs
oil for deep-frying

Small white shark are sometimes caught off the shores of the Madras coast. The shark weigh 5 or 6 lb (about 2.5 kg), and since they are sold whole, the Madras housewife usually has to cook shark for three or four meals, or share it with neighbours or family. Not many households can boast of a fridge, so the fish is cooked in different ways: in tamarind sauce, then perhaps fried, and for the third meal the cook may make shark fish cutlets. These cutlets are small, deep-fried fishcakes, and are excellent served with drinks. Alternatives to shark are tuna, salmon, or any easily flaked fish.

1. Clean and prepare the fish, cut into manageable pieces. Place in a pan with the salt, turmeric, chilli powder and ½ inch (1.5 cm) water, and poach until cooked.

2. Peel and quarter the onion, peel the garlic and ginger, de-seed the green chillies. Process to a coarse pulp in a food processor, or chop finely and grind with a pestle and mortar. Fry until soft in 2 tsp (10 g) ghee.

3. Drain the fish. Flake it, removing any bones, skin etc. Add the fried ingredients and the freshly ground black pepper to the fish and mix well. Set aside.

4. Loosely beat the egg white.

5. Form the fish mixture into 1-oz (30-g) balls, the size of walnuts. Dip in egg white and coat with the breadcrumbs.

6. Deep-fry the cutlets until golden brown. Drain on kitchen paper. Serve warm as an appetiser, or with masala potatoes and a green vegetable.

Simple tuna cutlets

TAMBRAPANE KODAVA

MAKES ABOUT 20

1 medium potato
1 medium onion
2 cloves garlic
½ inch (1.5 cm) fresh ginger
1 green chilli
1 x 1-lb (450-g) can of tuna flakes in oil
1 tsp freshly ground black pepper
salt to taste
white of 1 egg
2 tbsp dried (or roasted) breadcrumbs
oil for deep-frying

My mother used to make this quick and simple version of fish cutlets using tinned tuna when fresh shark was not available. Tuna cutlets go down a treat at cricket matches back home. They are good served alone as a warm appetiser, or with rice and a green vegetable

1. Peel and boil the potato until soft, then mash.

2. Meanwhile peel and quarter the onion, peel the garlic and ginger, de-seed the green chillies. Process to a coarse pulp in a food processor, or chop finely and grind coarsely with a pestle and mortar. Fry until soft in 1 tbsp (15 g) ghee.

3. Drain the tuna, and flake it. Add the mashed potato and black pepper, salt and the fried ingredients.

4. Loosely beat the egg white.

5. Form the fish mixture into small balls, the size of golf-balls. Coat with egg white and finally with the breadcrumbs.

6. Deep-fry the cutlets until golden brown. Drain on kitchen paper. Serve warm.

Selling the fresh catch

MEAT AND POULTRY

These dominions are provided with quantities of cattle such as cows and sheep, also of birds both those belonging to the hills and those recorded at home and those in greater abundance than in our tracts. They give three fowls in the city for a coin worth a vintem, outside the city they give five fowls for a vintem. In the country there are many ducks. All these birds are very cheap. The sheep they kill every day are countless, one could not count them, for in every street there are men who will sell you mutton so clean and so fat that it looks like beef; and you also have pigs in some streets of butcher's houses so black and clean that you could never see better in any country.

DON PASQUALES (A PORTUGUESE MERCHANT AND TRAVELLER WHO LIVED IN VIYAYANAGAR FOR MANY YEARS), 1587.

Generally, meat is marinated in spices before cooking – often for just half an hour. Yet meat for some recipes is marinated overnight so the aromatics have more chance to penetrate and tenderise it. A little water is added to the spices when marinating meat, to keep it moist – yogurt is also sometimes used as it tenderises the meat and helps to thicken the final sauce. It also helps the flavour to penetrate the meat by carrying the aromatics inside the fibres. (Where meat needs to be marinated for a long period, or overnight, this is noted at the start of the recipe.)

The main spices used to marinate meat are chilli powder and turmeric. Ground cumin with chilli is preferred in cooking lamb, along with cinnamon bark, cloves, cardamom, while ground coriander is used with chicken, beef and pork. In the recipes in this book, I have kept the combinations of spices simple, since I was taught that the aroma and flavour of natural ingredients should be enhanced and not

smothered. As my grandmother used to say: 'A neighbour should be able to tell what is cooking.' Overspicing is never good cooking, and many dishes need only the merest suspicion of aromatics.

Until the chilli was brought to India from South America, the main 'hot' spice was the peppercorn. *Thallitakari*, or just *kari*, is the term used for meat cooked with peppercorns, and is the origin of the word 'curry'.

The secret of braising meat lies in stewing it until it is saturated with the flavour of the aromatics. It is usually cooked in bite-sized pieces, except in biryanis and pulaos where bigger pieces are required. For mature meat, a long slow simmering is sometimes required to extract the juices; this softens the fibres and results in the meat being extremely tender.

Meat is prepared in various ways, with or without sauce. Vegetables such as potatoes, carrots, turnips, green beans, mangetout, peppers and mushrooms are added to some meat dishes to add texture and flavour.

Sauces are derived from coconut milk – sweet and delicately flavoured; from tamarind juices – acidic and sweet; or yogurt – rich and mild. Coconut milk added to sauces while cooking helps reduce their fieriness. Tomatoes and tomato purée are added but must be used with caution and subtlety, as they may mask the flavour and aroma of aromatics and spices. The thickness of a spicy sauce depends both on the cooking method used and the length of time that meat and onions are browned. Browned onions are an important thickener, and sauces are never thickened with flour.

Meat is served as a side dish only, unlike in the West where it forms the main part of the meal accompanied by vegetables. Some sections of the Tamil community don't eat certain types of meat for religious reasons: Hindus don't eat beef (the Brahmin caste is completely vegetarian), while pork is taboo to Muslims. Christians (who form the second largest religious community) and Muslims both eat beef, though, and the smaller communities of Anglo-Indians and Chinese sometimes enjoy the wild boar, whose flesh is sweeter than that of the domestic pig. Nearly all Tamilians eat mutton, spring lamb and chicken.

Spring lamb, being fatty but tender, is ideal for pulaos, biryanis and barbecues. Shoulder, chump chops, and neck fillets are ideal for lamb cooked in spicy sauces. For my beef dishes I use chine chops or topside; when choosing a cut of pork I use the leg, as it has a mixture of white and dark meat.

Meat is still sold in every street from a little hut in the mornings only, and the butcher's only implement is the wooden board and a sharp knife which cuts and minces very effectively. The meat is then wrapped in banana leaves and sold to the customers. Fresh chickens are sold in an adjoining hut – some are sold, live, in the markets.

Kotogari chicken

KOTOGARI KARAGU

8 oz (225 g) chicken breasts (thighs may be used instead)
1 tsp chilli powder
½ tsp turmeric
1 medium onion
¼ inch (6 mm) fresh ginger
1–2 cloves of garlic
1 large tomato
oil
1 tbsp ground coriander
salt and pepper to taste
1 tsp (5 ml) tomato purée
juice of ½ lime

Kotogari is a town in the hills, popular with visitors to Madras as a refuge from the summer heat. My mother made this beautifully spiced chicken dish for friends of mine when they visited ten years ago, and they talk of it still. It is simple to make, and a favourite in the classes I teach. Made without the chilli powder it is still delicious, but the turmeric (the true spice of south India) is essential.

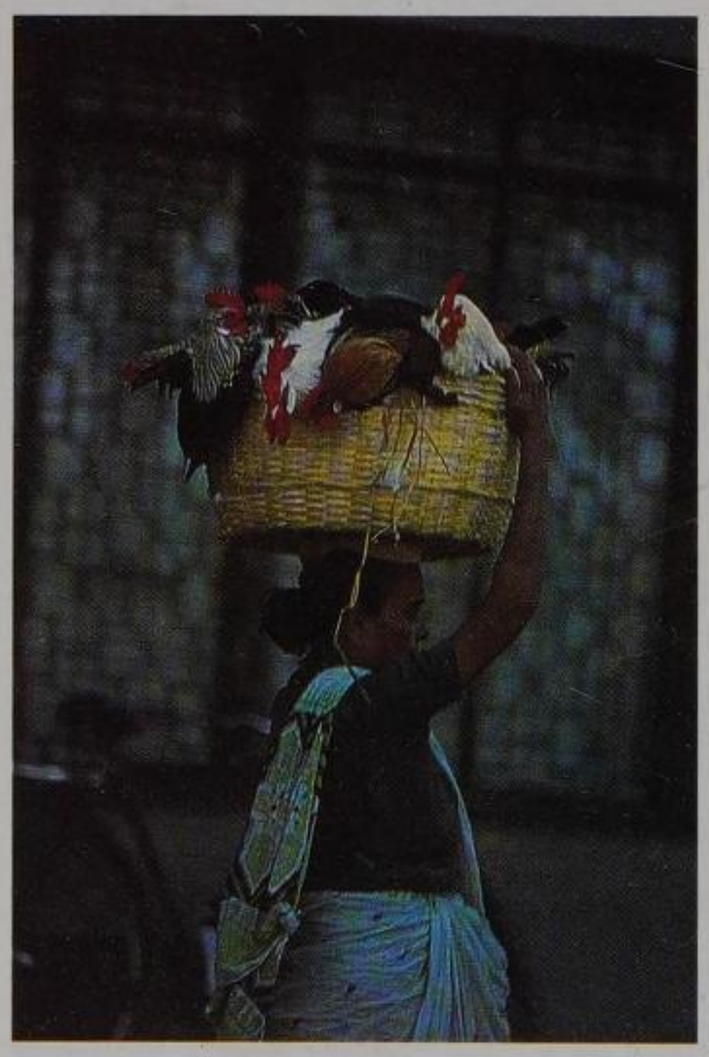
1. Cut the chicken into portions about 2 inches (5 cm) square. Wash them and season with the chilli powder and turmeric. Set aside.

2. Peel the onion and slice into thin rings. Peel, then chop or grate the ginger and garlic. Slice the tomato.

3. Fry the onion rings in 1 tbsp (15 ml) oil until soft and medium brown.

4. Add the chicken pieces and fry quite fast to brown the chicken. Add the garlic and ginger, ground coriander, and the salt and pepper.

5. Finally add the tomato, tomato purée and lime juice. Finish cooking over a low heat until the chicken is cooked (10–15 minutes). Serve hot.



LEFT: *Carrying poultry to market.*

FACING PAGE: *Kotogari chicken; Madras spinach (p.52); decorated rice (p. 15) with plain yogurt.*

Chicken kurma

KOLI KURMA

1 lb (450 g) chicken breasts or thighs
½ tsp chilli powder
¼ tsp turmeric
1 tsp salt
4 tbsp (60 ml) natural yogurt
1 medium onion
1 green chilli
2 cloves garlic
¼ inch (6 mm) fresh ginger
oil
small piece asafoetida (size of a black peppercorn)
¼ inch (6 mm) cinnamon bark
1 medium tomato
1 tbsp ground coriander
2 tsp ground cumin
1 tsp (5 ml) tomato purée
8 fl oz (250 ml) thick coconut milk (see glossary)

Optional: 2 oz (55 g) ground almonds, stalk of fresh coriander

Koor *means sharp, but* kurma *is quite the opposite – a mild dish especially recommended to anyone wary of Tamilian spices. Kurma, or korma, is a dish of meat in a mild and creamy sauce, prepared all over India. In the north it betrays its Persian influence as the meat is braised with yogurt and cream, whereas the creaminess in the Tamilian version comes from coconut (a richer sauce is made by the optional addition of ground almonds).*

1. Wash and dry the chicken (remove the skin if preferred). Season the chicken with the chilli powder, turmeric, salt and natural yogurt. Leave for at least 1 hour.

2. Peel the onion, then quarter it. De-seed the green chilli. Then grind the onion and chilli to a paste in a food processor, or chop finely and grind with a pestle and mortar.

3. Peel the garlic and ginger, chop finely and grind to a coarse paste with a pestle and mortar.

4. In 1 tbsp (15 ml) oil fry the asafoetida and piece of cinnamon bark. When there is an aroma add the onion and chilli mixture and fry until soft.

5. Add the marinated chicken pieces and fry gently for 10 minutes. Quarter the tomato. When the chicken is brown add the garlic and ginger paste together with the ground coriander and cumin, the tomato and tomato purée.

6. Continue to fry for about 5 minutes. Slowly add 4 tbsp (60 ml) water and the coconut milk, and stir to make a sauce.

7. Cover and finish cooking over a low heat for 20–30 minutes or until the chicken is ready. The ground almonds may be stirred in towards the end, to make a richer sauce. Chop the fresh coriander and stir in at the end of cooking.

Fried spicy chicken

KOZHI SHULLI

4–6 chicken breasts
1 tsp chilli powder
¼ tsp turmeric
½ tsp salt (or to taste)
oil

These delicious morsels of fried chicken are an ideal starter, giving guests a spicy and appetizing taste of things to come. They are best accompanied by other items to nibble, such as slices of raw cucumber or carrot, shredded fresh coconut and roasted peanuts.

1. Wash and dry the chicken breasts, remove the skin, and cut into strips about 1 inch (2.5 cm) across. Evenly cover the chicken strips with the chilli, turmeric and salt, and marinate for at least an hour.

2. Heat 2–3 tbsp oil in a frying-pan, and fry the chicken strips a few at a time until golden brown (about 5 minutes). Drain on kitchen paper and serve straight away.

Some Tamil girls who have marriages arranged for them do not enjoy any courting and wooing. On her wedding night her husband starts their married life by courting the bride. The bridal couple are usually left a plate of small titbits and snacks on a table beside their bed, which is decorated with strings of jasmine. The bride is escorted to the bedroom by her mother, sisters and friends, all giving advice in between girlish laughter.

The husband soon follows, and tempts his shy bride with the delicious fare . . .

Tandoori chicken

RANI SUNTHAKAS

4–6 chicken thighs
1 tsp chilli powder
¼ tsp turmeric
1 small onion
¼ inch (6 mm) fresh ginger
2 cloves garlic
six cardamom pods
1 tsp raisins
juice of ½ lime
1 tbsp masala mixture (see p. 156) or 1 tbsp bought tandoori powder
1 tbsp (15 ml) natural yogurt
1 tsp ground coriander
½ tsp salt (or to taste)
groundnut oil

A 3rd-century poem, the Perampanuru, tells of a traveller being served white rice and the flesh of a fowl roasted in spices by his host, a farmer – this must surely be the first written description of tandoori chicken.

Traditionally most cooking in India is done in pans, over heat. In addition tandoors, *or clay ovens, have been used from earliest times, and they give a good, dry heat. Foods cooked in these ovens retain their pure, unique flavours. However, you can use an oven at a high temperature to achieve the tandoor effect. Chicken tandoori has become a favourite in Britain, generally cooked northern-style. In Madras we have our own version, with onion, garlic, ginger and raisins added to the masala paste. To save time, use bought tandoori powder instead of the masala (spice blend).*

Tomato chutney (see p. 118) makes a good accompaniment, with rice.

◆ The meat needs to be marinated for at least 4 hours before cooking.

1. Wash and dry the chicken, remove the skin if preferred. Cover evenly with the chilli and turmeric.

2. Peel the onion and quarter it. Peel the ginger and garlic. Remove cardamom seeds from the pods, discard pods. Place in a food processor with the raisins, and grind to a paste (or chop finely and pound them with a pestle and mortar).

3. Mix the masala or bought tandoori powder to a paste with the yogurt and 2 tsp (10 ml) lime juice.

4. Cut slits in the chicken, then coat evenly with the masala or tandoori paste, ground coriander, salt and the ground onion and spice mixture. Leave for 4 hours.

5. Pre-heat the oven on maximum heat. Reduce the heat of the oven to 180°C/350°F, gas mark 4, place the chicken pieces on a greased tray and roast for 1 hour (turn the chicken pieces and brush with a little oil half-way through cooking).

Barbecued chicken on skewers

TUTUKORI THANDURAM

MAKES 10 'KEBABS'

1 small onion
3 cloves garlic
1 inch (2.5 cm) fresh ginger
1 tsp white poppy seeds
1 tsp lovage seeds
¼ inch (6 mm) cinnamon bark
2 tsp ground coriander
1 tsp chilli powder
white malt vinegar
sesame oil
4 fl oz (125 ml) natural yogurt
salt
1 tsp brown sugar
1 tsp freshly ground black pepper
juice of a lime
1 lb (450 g) chicken thighs or breasts
20 shallots
10 cherry tomatoes
1 green capsicum
1 red capsicum
1 tsp red food colouring (or coxcomb)

Tamilians, especially young people, love barbecues – I certainly did in my student days. Traditionally, cooking over fire was considered to purify food.

This dish is equally well suited to the long hot days of an English summer: pieces of spiced chicken are threaded onto skewers with marinated shallots and cherry tomatoes, and with capsicums, then grilled.

◆ The chicken needs to be marinated for at least 4 hours before cooking (the longer the better) and the vegetables for 2 hours.

1. Peel the small onion and quarter it. Peel the garlic and ginger. Place in a food processor with the poppy seeds, lovage seeds and cinnamon bark, and chop to a smooth consistency (or chop finely and pound with a pestle and mortar).

2. Add the ground coriander, chilli powder, 2 tsp (10 ml) vinegar, 1 tbsp (15 ml) sesame oil, yogurt, 1 tsp salt, sugar, pepper and colouring. Add half the lime juice (reserve the remainder).

3. Cut the chicken into around 20 cubes and mix with the paste, making sure all the pieces are well coated. Set aside for 4–8 hours.

4. Meanwhile peel the shallots. Wash the cherry tomatoes. Mix the remaining lime juice with 1 tsp (5 ml) vinegar, ½ tsp salt and 1 tbsp (15 ml) sesame oil. Marinate the tomatoes and shallots in this mixture for 2 hours.

5. Wash the capsicums and cut each into 10 pieces.

6. Thread 10 skewers, each with 1 tomato, 2 shallots, 1 piece of each capsicum and 2 pieces of chicken. Grill, turning frequently, until the chicken is cooked (3 minutes on a hot barbecue, 5 minutes under a hot grill. (Drizzle with oil if they appear to be drying out.)

Roast marinated chicken

KARUGU BHARJANAM

1 small chicken (2–2½ lb/1 kg)
1 inch (2.5 cm) fresh ginger
2 cloves garlic
2 fresh red chillies
2 cardamom pods
2 cloves
2 stalks fresh coriander leaves
¼ inch (6 mm) cinnamon bark
4 tbsp (60 ml) yogurt
1 medium red onion

Tamilian women have put their own special touches to dishes they have enjoyed in other parts of the world, for they carry their palettes of spices with them, as artists carry their colours.

This is my own recipe for roast chicken, flavoured with the spices of my homeland – bharjanam *means to roast. The sliced onions add sweetness, and make an attractive garnish. I serve it with masala potato (p. 56), tomato or aubergine chutney (pp. 117–18) and mangetout (p. 43).*

◆ The marinating should be started 4 or 5 hours before cooking, so that the yogurt can tenderise the meat.

1. Wash and dry the chicken, inside and out.

2. Peel and roughly chop the fresh ginger and garlic. De-seed the fresh red chillies. Open the cardamom pods and remove the seeds, discarding the pods.

3. Finely chop the ginger, garlic, chilli, cardamom seeds, cloves, fresh coriander and cinnamon bark and grind with a pestle and mortar (or grind together in a food processor with a bowl for small quantities).

4. Place in a dish large enough to take the chicken, and add the yogurt. Stir it well. Place the chicken in the dish and turn it in the mixture until evenly covered. Marinate for 4–5 hours.

5. Peel the onion and slice into rings ¼ inch (6 mm) thick.

6. Prepare the oven: the chicken will go on a roasting rack (or directly on the shelf) with a tray beneath it. Pre-heat to 160°C/325°F, gas mark 3.

7. Remove the chicken from the marinade. Place the chicken on the rack and cover with the onion slices. Pour 4 tbsp (60 ml) water into the tray (this will help crisp the skin). Roast for 1½ hours or until the chicken is cooked.

Duck with coconut

VEDDUVAR VARTHA

1 x 3 lb/1.5 kg duck (or 1 lb/450 g duck breasts)
salt to taste
2 medium onions
4 fresh red chillies
2 cloves garlic
½ inch (1.5 cm) fresh ginger
½ tsp fenugreek seeds
2 tbsp ground coriander
1 tsp turmeric
1 tsp ground cumin
1 oz (30 g) ghee
8 fl oz (250 ml) thin coconut milk
4 oz (110 g) walnut pieces
2 tbsp (30 ml) thick coconut milk

Duck is a rich meat. Here it is combined with coconut in an unusual and magnificent creamy sauce; spices give a touch of piquancy, and walnuts add texture and flavour. People say that duck was 'popular with the British in India, who tired of endless chicken! Any duck may be used, reared or game (though the flavour of the latter will be more intense). The sauce is rich, so choose at least one light vegetable, such as green peas with lovage seeds (p. 44), or fried long beans (p. 47), simple rice (p. 14) and tayar pachadi (p. 115).

1. Cut the duck into pieces around an inch square (remove the skin, if preferred). Prick the duck pieces with a fork, cover evenly with 1–2 tsp salt (to taste) and stand for an hour.

2. Peel the onions. Cut in half lengthwise and slice finely into half-rounds.

3. De-seed the fresh red chillies. Peel the garlic and ginger.

4. Finely chop the chillies, garlic and fresh ginger, add the fenugreek seeds, and grind with a pestle and mortar (or use a food processor with a bowl for small quantities). Mix in the ground coriander, turmeric and ground cumin.

5. Heat the ghee in a heavy-based saucepan over a low heat. Brown the duck pieces. Remove and set them aside.

6. In the same ghee fry the sliced onions and brown them. Next add the ground ingredients and cook until the aroma is released. Add the thin coconut milk, cover the pan, and cook for 15 minutes.

7. Stir in the walnut pieces and the thick coconut milk, cover once more and cook for a further 5–10 minutes, or until the duck is done.

Pondicherry lamb

PANCHANAGA SEEKARANE

MAKES 8 ROULADES

3 medium onions
2 cloves garlic
1 inch (2.5 cm) fresh ginger
2 green chillies
½ oz (15 g) blanched almonds
sprig of fresh coriander
½ oz (15 g) raisins
8 lamb chump chops, each ¼ inch (6 mm) thick
cocktail sticks or cotton thread
1 ripe mango (optional)
1 tsp white poppy seeds
ghee
½ tsp turmeric
1 tsp chilli powder
2 tsp ground coriander
2 tsp ground cumin
½ tsp salt (or to taste)
1½ tbsp (25 ml) natural yogurt

My French lecturer in college taught me this spiced lamb roulade dish. She was from Pondicherry, where the cooking has French influences (Tamilians in Pondicherry use a lot of fresh milk and yogurt in their cooking). So anyone who likes their sauces creamy will enjoy this recipe. Sliced fresh mangoes are added for extra flavour.

Preparation will be much easier if you ask your butcher to slice the chops for you – they should be no thicker than ¼ inch (6 mm). Pondicherry lamb may be served with fried new potatoes (p. 59) or sauté potatoes, or saffron rice (p. 17) and a vegetable such as mangetout with ginger and chilli (p. 43).

1. Peel the onions, garlic and ginger.

2. Finely chop 1 onion and half the ginger, place in a bowl. De-seed and slice the green chillies. Chop the blanched almonds. Roughly chop the fresh coriander.

3. Mix together all the chopped ingredients, and add the raisins. Put to one side. (MIXTURE 1.)

4. Quarter the remaining 2 onions. Place them in a food processor with the garlic and remaining ginger. Process to a pulp, or chop finely and crush with a pestle and mortar. (MIXTURE 2.)

5. Spread out the first chop on a plate or board. Place a heaped teaspoon of Mixture 1 in the middle and spread out a little (but not to the edges). Roll the meat lightly and secure with cocktail sticks or cotton thread. Make all the roulades in this way.

6. If adding mango, peel and slice it thinly.

7. Grind the poppy seeds in a coffee grinder or pestle and mortar.

8. In a heavy saucepan (which will be large enough to take the rolls of meat in one layer) heat 1 tbsp (15 g) ghee and stir-fry Mixture 2 until golden brown. If the mixture starts to stick to the pan a little hot water may be added.

9. Add the turmeric, chilli powder, ground coriander, ground cumin, ground poppy seeds and salt.

10. Lightly beat the natural yogurt until smooth and add to the fried mixture in the saucepan.

11. Add the mango, if using. Stirring frequently, fry the sauce over low heat until the yogurt has blended and changes to a yellow colour.

12. Place the roulades in the mixture, turning so that they are well covered. Add a little warm water to cover, if required. Cover the pan. Lower heat and simmer gently until meat is tender (20 minutes). Adjust the sauce by adding water or mango juice if required.

Tambaram's lamb

TAMBARAM CHAKKALIKA

1 small onion
1 clove garlic
½ inch (1.5 cm) fresh ginger
3 fresh red chillies
½ tsp turmeric
½ tsp ground cumin
2 tsp (10 ml) vinegar
½ tsp salt (or to taste)
8 oz (225 g) spring lamb (neck fillet)
ghee

This dish is a popular choice with young Tamilians, who love to set up makeshift beach barbecues. It is usually made with kid meat, which is available nearly all year round, but here a good alternative is tender spring lamb, marinated in yogurt and spices. Cook it over a barbecue or under a hot grill.

◆ Marinate overnight for best results.

1. Peel and quarter the onion, peel the garlic and ginger. De-seed the chillies. Place them all in a food processor and reduce to a fine pulp (or chop finely and grind with a pestle and mortar). Add the turmeric, ground cumin, vinegar and salt.

2. Cut the meat into 1-inch (2.5-cm) cubes, and cover well with the paste. Leave overnight or for 8 hours.

3. Thread the cubes of meat onto skewers, and cook over a barbecue or under a hot grill. Turn the skewers frequently and baste with melted ghee. (They will require 3–4 minutes on a hot barbecue, 5–6 under a grill.)

Chops with peppercorns

TRICHINNAPOLLI THALLITAKARI

1 medium onion
½ inch (1.5 cm) fresh ginger
1 clove garlic
2 small fresh green chillies
1 sprig of fresh coriander
1 tsp cumin seeds
1 tsp black peppercorns
1 oz (30 g) raw unsalted cashew nuts
oil
1 lb (450 g) chump or loin lamb chops, or T-bone sirloin steak
1 tsp turmeric
1 tsp salt (or to taste)
3 tbsp (45 ml) thick coconut milk (see glossary) or fresh orange juice
ghee

Though this recipe, a very old one passed down to me, is called 'chops', the meat is in fact cubed before cooking (your butcher may do this for you). It is best to use meat from next to the bone, however, as it is sweet and gives extra flavour to a dish. The sauce can be made with coconut milk or with fresh orange juice to brighten the flavour.

1. Peel the onion, cut in half lengthwise, and slice into thin half-rings. Peel, finely chop and crush the ginger and garlic. De-seed and finely slice the fresh green chillies. Wash and chop the fresh coriander.

2. Grind the cumin seeds and peppercorns in a coffee grinder or pestle and mortar.

3. Fry the cashew nuts in 1 tbsp (15 ml) oil over a low heat until they are golden brown. Put to one side.

4. Cut the meat into ½-inch (1.5-cm) cubes.

5. Place the meat in a heavy-based saucepan. Add the turmeric, salt, and coconut milk (or orange juice). Heat, then simmer for 5 minutes. Set aside.

6. In a saucepan, heat 1 tbsp (15 g) ghee and fry the thinly sliced onion until soft and golden brown. Then add the meat and fry until an aroma arises. Next add the crushed garlic, ginger and green chilli. Cover the pan and cook over low heat for 10–15 minutes (there should be just a little sauce left).

7. Add the ground cumin and peppercorns, the fresh coriander leaves, and roasted cashew nuts. Mix and cook for a further 5 minutes, then serve.

Grandma's lamb

NANDANAM BHARJITA, OR DING-DING

1 lb (450 g) lean lamb
1 tsp salt
1 tsp chilli powder
½ tsp turmeric
1 tsp sugar
oil for deep frying

My grandmother taught me this recipe: I serve it with drinks, as an appetiser. This is an old recipe, and would have been offered to passing travellers by herdsmen, showing their hospitality. It may have been made with salt meat in the past, when salt was used as a preservative (then hung outside for a day to dry), but our recipe calls for the lamb to be salted overnight. Cooking is by the fast apakava *method – deep frying.*

1. Wash the meat, slice very thinly (⅛ inch/2 mm thickness) and cut into pieces about ¾ x 1½ inches (2 x 4 cm). Dry thoroughly with kitchen paper. Sprinkle evenly with the salt and leave to marinate overnight.

2. Blot any moisture with kitchen paper, then place in a large bowl, sprinkle with the chilli powder, turmeric and sugar, and mix well so the meat is evenly coated.

3. Deep fry the lamb strips in hot oil until crispy and dry (2–3 minutes). Drain well on kitchen paper.

4. Serve immediately, or allow to cool and store for up to a week in an airtight jar or container until ready to be used.

There are different terms used to address the male and female members of a Tamil family. The younger sister is called tangochi and the older akka, chita is for a younger aunt and athai for an aunt on the father's side. Whereas periama means older aunt on the mother's side, Patti is Tamil for grandmother and puth for great-grandmother, whereas great-aunts are called Chith-Patti or Athai-Patti.

Spiced lamb

TEYNEMPET PRIYALA

1 lb (450 g) lean lamb (leg or neck fillet)
1 medium onion
2 cloves garlic
¼ inch (6 mm) fresh ginger
1 medium tomato
salt
1 tsp chilli powder
1 tsp (5 ml) tomato purée
ghee or oil
¼ inch (6 mm) cinnamon bark
3 cardamom pods
2 cloves
2 tsp ground coriander
1 tsp ground cumin

This is a popular and beautifully spiced Tamilian dish, very quick to make. In the past lamb was a royal dish, and the meat would often be cut into the shape of the Tamil gooseberry, amblikai.

I was introduced to this recipe by my six aunts, who looked after me while I was in college. I like to think that the six spices used in it represent them!

Simple rice (p. 14), or tamarind rice (p. 16), are good accompaniments.

1. Cube the meat and set aside.

2. Peel the onion and slice finely. Peel and finely chop the garlic and ginger. Roughly chop the tomato.

3. Place the meat in a saucepan with 1½ tbsp (25 ml) water, chilli powder, salt to taste, tomato and the tomato purée. Cover, then simmer over medium heat for 5 minutes. Remove and set aside.

4. In another saucepan heat 1 tbsp (15 g/15 ml) ghee or oil and fry the cinnamon, cardamom and cloves until there is an aroma. Next add the sliced onions, garlic and ginger, and cook until soft. Finally add the lamb and 2 tbsp (30 ml) water, with the ground coriander and cumin. Cover and cook for a further 10 minutes, then serve.

FACING PAGE: *Spiced lamb with tamarind rice (p. 16); fried long beans (p. 47) and just okra (p. 46)*

Lamb frikadels

NIKKAMA VESAVARA

1 lb (450 g) lean minced lamb
¼ tsp turmeric
1 tsp chilli powder
½ tsp salt (or to taste)
1 tsp (5 ml) tomato purée
1 medium onion
1 green chilli
1 clove garlic
¼ inch (6 mm) fresh ginger
1 tsp cumin seeds
1 tsp black peppercorns
1 egg
2 oz (55 g) dried breadcrumbs
oil for deep frying

These spiced meatballs became a favourite with the Dutch, who came to Madras as spice traders, and now they usually go by the Dutch name. They are a variation on an older recipe, vesavara, *which had slightly different spices. These are delicious with drinks before a meal, or as part of the main meal itself – with masala potato (see p. 56) and perhaps Nilgiris salad (p. 63).*

1. Place the minced lamb in a pan with the turmeric, chilli powder, salt, tomato purée and 2 tsp (10 ml) water. Cook gently for 5–10 minutes.

2. Peel the onion and chop finely. De-seed the green chilli and slice thinly. Peel and finely chop the garlic and ginger.

3. Grind the cumin seeds and black peppercorns using a coffee grinder or crush with a pestle and mortar.

4. Fry the onion in a little oil until soft. Add the garlic, ginger, green chilli and the ground spices and fry for 2–3 minutes.

5. Place the cooked minced meat, plus the fried onion mixture in a food processor and process so that the mixture becomes more even in consistency (but not as smooth as a purée). Alternatively, put through a fine mincer.

6. Separate the egg. Loosely beat the yolk and add to the mixture to bind it. Loosely beat the white and set aside.

7. Form the mixture into walnut-sized balls. Dip each ball in beaten egg white and roll in the breadcrumbs.

8. Heat the oil (it should be hot enough to brown a small cube of bread instantly). Deep fry the frikadels, a few at a time, for 5 minutes. Drain on kitchen paper and serve warm or cold.

Masala beef

NAMBAR PADDITARAM

1 lb (450 g) lean beef
salt to taste
1 tsp freshly ground black pepper
2 oz (55 g) cashew nuts
5–6 shallots
2 cloves garlic
1 inch (2.5 cm) fresh ginger
2 cloves
½ inch (1.5 cm) cinnamon bark
2 cardamom pods
½ tsp turmeric
1 tsp chilli powder
1 tsp ground cumin
1 tbsp ground coriander
2 tsp (10 ml) white malt vinegar
4 tbsp (60 ml) hot water
½ oz (15 g) tamarind
ghee
fresh coriander leaves

This dish was prepared for me by a college friend . The meat is cooked with tamarind – noteworthy because this combination is mentioned in early Tamil literature. The dish blends tamarind with both fiery and warm spices, and is garnished with milky-flavoured cashew nuts.

1. Cut the beef into 1-inch (2.5-cm) cubes. Season with salt and black pepper. Set aside for an hour.

2. Meanwhile heat 2 tsp (10 g) ghee in a saucepan and fry the cashew nuts until they are golden and crisp.

3. Peel the shallots and slice finely. Peel and finely chop the garlic and ginger.

4. In a coffee grinder, or pestle and mortar, grind the cloves, cinnamon bark and cardamom pods. Place in a small bowl with the turmeric, chilli powder, ground cumin and ground coriander. Add the vinegar and mix well to form a fine paste. Set aside.

5. Add the hot water to the tamarind. Stir with a spoon and let it infuse for 5 minutes, then strain and reserve the liquid.

6. Heat 2 oz (55 g) ghee in a heavy-based saucepan over a medium flame, and brown the beef evenly. Remove and set aside.

7. In the same saucepan fry the garlic until brown. Then add the sliced shallots and fry until soft and golden. Next add the chopped ginger and the spice paste. Keep frying until the aroma arises. Return the browned beef to the saucepan. Lower the heat.

8. Add the tamarind liquid. Cover the pan and simmer for 15 minutes.

9. Garnish the beef with the cashew nuts and fresh coriander leaves.

Beef vindaloo

VELLAKARAN VINTHELEUX

2 medium onions
2 cloves garlic
½ inch (1.5 cm) fresh ginger
4 fresh green bird chillies (to taste)
3 cardamom pods
3 dried red chillies (to taste)
3 cloves
½ inch (1.5 cm) cinnamon bark
1 tsp black peppercorns
1 tsp fenugreek seeds
1 tsp cumin seeds
½ oz (15 g) tamarind
1 lb (450 g) braising steak
ghee
piece of asafoetida (size of a black peppercorn)
¼ tsp salt (or to taste)
½ tsp turmeric
1 tbsp ground coriander
1 tomato
1 tsp sugar

The lucrative spice trade between India and the West was established at least 200 years BC. Centuries later, chillies were brought from South America by the Portuguese, and quickly took an important place in Tamilian cooking. From these spices Tamilians created a well-known masterpiece, said to be the hottest dish in the world.

Vindaloo *is a sauce believed to purify, to heal and to cool, in accordance with Hindu philosophy. It has a unique blend of pungent red peppers, hot black ground pepper and a mixture of other spices. The recipe given is extremely hot, and most people will find this too fiery – it is best to cook it with smaller quantities of chilli (the dried red chillies may be omitted completely) the first time you try it.*

A dish of cooling yogurt or pachadi should be on the table when vindaloo is served. Vindaloo should be treated with respect, like the Indian tiger!

1. Peel the onions and quarter them. Chop the onions to a pulp in a food processor, or chop finely and crush with a pestle and mortar.

2. Peel the garlic and ginger, chop finely and grind to a paste. De-seed and grind the green chillies. Set aside separately.

3. Remove the seeds from the cardamom pods, discarding the pods. De-seed the dried red chillies (if using) and grind finely in a coffee grinder before adding the cardamom seeds, cloves, cinnamon stick, black peppercorns, fenugreek seeds and cumin seeds. Set aside.

4. Infuse the tamarind in 4 tbsp (60 ml) hot water for 8 minutes. Strain and reserve the liquid.

5. Cut the braising steak into 1-inch (2.5-cm) cubes.

6. Heat 2 tbsp (30 g) ghee in a pan and fry the asafoetida for a minute. Then add the cubed beef with the salt and turmeric. When browned, remove and set aside.

7. Fry the onions until soft then add the ground ginger and garlic. Return the browned meat to the pan and stir-fry for 5 minutes.

8. Add the ground green chillies, the freshly ground dried spices, and the ground coriander.

9. Roughly chop the tomato and add to the pan. Add the sugar, tamarind juice and ¼ pint (150 ml) hot water.

10. Cover and simmer over a low heat until the meat is cooked (15–20 minutes).

Beef with chillies

TAMBRAPARNE ARACHI KOOTU

1 oz (30 g) tamarind
2 medium onions
1 clove garlic
4 small red fresh chillies
¼ inch (6 mm) fresh ginger
½ tsp turmeric
1 tsp ground cumin
2 tsp ground coriander
1 lb (450 g) beef
oil
¼ tsp salt (or to taste)
1 tsp brown sugar

All shopping is done in small quantities in Madras, on a daily basis. Women peddling fresh produce carry on their heads baskets of fresh red chillies (maligai), sometimes with other fresh vegetables. Tamilians choose small red chillies for this fiery dish – they are often the hottest. Adjust the quantity of chilli to taste, or use milder, green chillies.

1. Infuse the tamarind in 4 tbsp (60 ml) hot water for 8 minutes, then strain and reserve the liquid.

2. Peel the onions and slice finely. Peel and finely chop the garlic.

3. De-seed and very finely slice the fresh red chillies. Peel and finely chop or grate the ginger. Grind the chillies and ginger together with a pestle and mortar. Mix them with the turmeric, ground cumin and coriander.

4. Cut the beef into ½ inch (1.5 cm) cubes.

5. Heat 1 tbsp (15 ml) oil in a heavy-based saucepan and fry the garlic until it turns brown. Add the onion and cook until golden brown. Then add the spice mixture and fry until the aroma is released. Add the meat and stir until well covered with the spices.

6. Finally add the strained tamarind juice, sugar and salt to taste. Cover the pan and cook for a further 10–15 minutes.

Spiced pork with orange

SUNTHAKA BHAGAYAR

1 orange
4 shallots
3 fresh red chillies
1 inch (2.5 cm) fresh ginger
1 lb (450 g) lean pork fillet
ghee
½ inch (1.5 cm) cinnamon bark
½ tsp turmeric
1 tbsp ground coriander
2 stalks neem leaves
2 tsp (10 ml) honey
1 tsp ground nutmeg
½ tsp salt (or to taste)
1 tsp ground black pepper

This is a dish from the forests of Madras – home to the wild pigs, whose sweet meat reflects their foraged diet of roots and leaves (though the sweetest meat of all is that of wild pigs from the sugar plantations). It was also the forest-dwellers of times past who collected maksika, wild honey, which they used for barter. Here the tanginess in the dish comes from freshly squeezed orange juice.

1. Wash the orange well, then grate the zest from half of it and set aside. Squeeze the whole orange and reserve the juice. Peel and slice the shallots. De-seed and slice the fresh red chillies. Peel and finely chop the ginger. Wash and cut the pork into 1-inch (2.5-cm) cubes. Set aside

2. Grind the chillies and ginger together in a pestle and mortar.

3. Heat 1 tbsp (15 g) ghee in a heavy-based saucepan, add the pork and cinnamon bark. Brown the pork evenly, then remove and set aside. In the same pan, fry the sliced shallots until soft and golden brown.

4. Add the ground chilli and ginger, the turmeric and ground coriander, and fry for a minute, until the aroma is released. Then add the neem leaves and return the pork to the saucepan.

5. Stir in the honey, ground nutmeg, grated orange rind and 1 tsp (5 ml) water. Add salt to taste, the black pepper, then add 4 tbsp (60 ml) orange juice. Cover the pan and simmer for 15–20 minutes before serving.

Pork with shallots and onion

VILLAVAR KUY

1 large onion
6 shallots
2 cloves garlic
1 inch (2.5 cm) fresh ginger
1 lb (450 g) lean pork
salt to taste
2 cardamom pods
ghee
1 tsp chilli powder
2 tsp ground coriander
4 tbsp (60 ml) plain yogurt
1 tsp ground black pepper

Wild boar has never been a forbidden meat to Hindus, and it has been carried home by hunters, villavar, *since earliest times. Hunting wild boar became a popular sport with the British in India, too.*

The use of both shallots and onion gives this recipe extra flavour, and pork bought here will taste just as good as wild boar, if milder.

1. Peel the onion, and slice finely. Peel the shallots and slice finely. Put to one side, keeping them separate.

2. Peel and chop the garlic and ginger. Grind them together with a pestle and mortar.

3. Cut the pork into 1-inch (2.5-cm) cubes, sprinkle with a little salt and set aside.

4. In a heavy-based saucepan heat 1 tbsp (15 g) ghee and fry the cardamom pods until the aroma is released, then add the sliced onion and cook until soft. Remove and set aside. Now fry the cubed pork until it has browned well. Remove and set aside.

5. With the saucepan off the heat, stir in the chilli powder. Once the ghee turns red, place it back on the heat, add the shallots, ground ginger and garlic and fry until they are brown.

6. Add the browned pork with the ground coriander, yogurt, black pepper and 2 tbsp (30 ml) warm water. Stir well to blend, cover the pan and simmer for 10 minutes. Add the fried onions, cover the pan and cook for a further 10 minutes, then serve.

Pork with mushrooms

CHINNE PORIKARI

6 oz (170 g) belly pork
10 oz (280 g) lean pork fillet
1 tsp chilli powder
2 tsp (10 ml) tomato purée
1 medium onion
1 clove garlic
¼ inch (6 mm) fresh ginger
1 oz (30 g) button mushrooms
oil
2 tsp ground coriander
4 tbsp (60 ml) water
1 tsp salt (or to taste)

South India had connections with China from the earliest times, with merchants trading their wares across land and sea. Madras has always had a small Chinese community, and this recipe has a distinctive Chinese flavour with Tamilian overtones. It came to me from my grandmother, whose cook was given it by a Chinese missionary many years ago. We give dishes with a Chinese influence the name chinne *– which also means sweet. Serve with simple rice (p. 14), and vegetables such as carrots with aniseed (p. 60) and green beans.*

1. Slice the belly pork and pork fillet into small pieces. Coat them with the chilli powder and tomato purée, and marinate for half an hour.

2. Peel and chop the onion coarsely. Peel the garlic and ginger, chop and crush them. Wash or wipe the mushrooms, halve them and set aside.

3. Heat 1 tbsp (15 ml) oil and fry the onion until soft. Add the pork and cook until the meat browns. Then add the ginger, garlic, ground coriander and salt to taste. Lower the heat and add the water. Cover and cook for 10 minutes.

4. Add the mushrooms, then cook for a further 10 minutes.

Cutlets

THANJAVUR TUVAI

MAKES 8–10

1 lb (450 g) old potatoes
1 medium onion
1 clove of garlic
½ inch (1.5 cm) fresh ginger
1 green chilli (optional)
ghee
fresh coriander
1 lb (450 g) minced beef, lamb, pork or chicken
pinch of salt
½ tsp turmeric
1 tsp chilli powder
lemon juice
1 egg
10–12 cream crackers, crushed
oil

Tamilians refer to spicy meat made into croquettes or stuffed between mashed potatoes as cutlets, though the older name for meat ground with spices is tuvai. *This recipe was passed on to my mother from my grandmother, who was given this recipe by her mother. In Madras I use minced mutton, but in England I use minced beef, and my sisters have tried it with minced chicken. You might like to experiment, and decide which is your favourite. All three are equally delicious with a dish of green peas with lovage seeds (see p. 44).*

1. Peel the potatoes and boil until soft. Mash and put to one side.

2. Peel the onions, garlic and ginger. Chop finely. De-seed the green chilli and chop finely. Finely chop the fresh coriander.

3. Season the meat with the salt, turmeric and chilli powder.

4. Heat 1 tbsp (15 g) ghee in a saucepan over a medium heat and fry the finely chopped onion, garlic and ginger until the onion is soft and golden brown.

5. Add the minced meat, lower the heat and fry the meat in its own juices until cooked (5–8 minutes). Add the lemon juice and add the chopped fresh coriander. Stir well, remove from the heat and allow to cool slightly.

6. Lightly beat the egg.

7. To make the cutlets, place a tablespoon of mashed potato in the palm of your hand and press firmly with the back of a spoon. Place 2 teaspoonfuls of the meat mixture in the middle. Cover with a second tablespoon of mashed potato. Press firmly between both hands to make a small potato cake. Coat with beaten egg, then dip in the crumbs. Make the other cutlets in this way until the ingredients are used up.

8. Heat 3 tbsp (45 ml) oil in a wok or frying pan. Shallow fry the cutlets a few at a time, until they are golden brown, turning once. Drain on kitchen paper. Serve hot, with a green vegetable or salad.

Round meatballs in spicy sauce

VIRANDALI URANDAKARI KOLOMBA

1 lb (450 g) minced chicken, lamb, beef or pork
¾ tsp turmeric
1½ tsp chilli powder
2 tsp salt
2 medium onions
3 cloves garlic
1 green chilli
½ inch (1.5 cm) fresh ginger
1 egg
1 tbsp ground coriander
2 tsp ground cumin
2 tsp (10 ml) tomato purée
1 medium tomato
¼ inch (6 mm) cinnamon bark
2 cloves
2 cardamom pods
fresh coriander
1 medium potato
2 medium carrots
1½ oz (45 g) tamarind
ghee

Spiced meatballs of this type were popular with the Raj, and are served all over India (the Hindi name is kofta, and the Tamil name urandakari). The recipe varies from region to region. These are quite small, and are cooked and served in a slightly sweet tamarind sauce, with pieces of potato (carrot may be used in place of some of the potato).

◆ The minced meat should be marinated for as long as convenient (an hour or overnight).

1. Season the minced meat with ¼ tsp of the turmeric, ½ tsp chilli powder, and 1 tsp salt. Leave to one side to marinate.

2. Peel and chop finely one of the onions, 1 clove garlic and half the ginger. De-seed and finely slice the green chilli. Add these to the marinated meat. Separate the egg and add the yolk to the meat (reserve the white).

3. Form the meat mixture into 1-oz (30-g) balls, and set aside.

4. Peel or scrape the potatoes and carrots, and cut into ¼ inch (6 mm) cubes. Cover with water and set aside.

5. Infuse the tamarind in ¾ pint (450 ml) hot water for 5 minutes. Strain and set the tamarind liquid to one side.

6. Make a paste with the remaining turmeric, chilli powder, ground coriander, tomato purée, and a tablespoon of tamarind liquid.

7. Peel the second onion and chop coarsely. Peel and finely chop the remaining ginger and garlic. Roughly chop the tomato.

8. Beat the egg white and put to one side.

9. In a large, heavy saucepan, heat 1 tbsp (15 g) ghee and then fry the cinnamon bark, whole cloves and cardamom pods. When the aroma is released add the spice paste, and fry until the aroma of these spices is released. Add the chopped onion, ginger and garlic, and cook until the onion softens. Then add the remaining tamarind liquid and the chopped tomato. Add the ground cumin and salt.

10. Bring the sauce to the boil and add the potato (and carrot, if using). Cover and cook gently for 10 minutes.

11. Meanwhile, carefully dip each meat ball into egg white, then lower into the boiling sauce. Cover and cook over low heat for another 10 minutes. Stir in the chopped coriander leaves, then cook for a further 5 minutes. Serve.

Fried lambs' kidneys

POONAMALEE APAKAVA

This dish is sometimes served with chappatis or pooris on a big circular thal, *or tray (women use a smaller one, known as the* thali*). The garlic, ginger and spices make this recipe a hot one, and the touch of lime juice tempts the appetite. It may be served as one of several dishes, or simply with chappatis as a light meal.*

8 oz (225 g) lambs' kidneys
[or 4 oz (110 g) each kidneys and sweetbreads]
1 medium onion
1 green chilli
1 clove garlic
½ inch (1.5 cm) fresh ginger
1 tsp chilli powder
¼ tsp turmeric
2 tsp ground coriander
1 tsp fresh ground black pepper
juice of a lime
1 tsp salt
ghee

1. Wash the kidneys well and cut each into quarters.

2. Peel the onion and chop coarsely. De-seed and finely slice the green chilli. Peel, then chop or grate the garlic and ginger.

3. Mix the chilli powder, turmeric, ground coriander and black pepper with 2 tbsp (30 ml) lime juice to form a paste. Coat the kidneys in the paste and the onion mixture. Sprinkle with the salt. Leave aside to marinate for ½–1 hour.

4. Heat 2 tsp (10 g) ghee over a low heat. Fry the onion until soft. Add the garlic, ginger and green chilli, fry for a minute. Add the marinated kidneys and fry for a further 8–10 minutes (the kidneys will still be just soft). Add another 1 tsp (5 ml) lime juice, then cook gently (covered) for a further 5 minutes. Serve.

Fried chicken livers

KARUGA CHATNA

8–10 chicken livers (8 oz/225 g)
salt to taste
½ tsp ground turmeric
1 tsp chilli powder
1 small onion
¼ inch (6 mm) fresh ginger
1 sprig fresh coriander
oil
2 tsp ground coriander
1 tsp sugar
1 tsp (5 ml) tomato purée

Cooked with a little spice, chicken livers make a delicious and tender dish, excellent as a light lunch with rice and pachadi (see p. 115). Tamilians believe that livers, because of the iron they contain, are great givers of strength – a dish to help one cope with the pressures of the world!

1. Wash the livers and cut into bite-size pieces. Place in a dish and season with salt, the turmeric and chilli powder.

2. Peel and chop the onion. Finely chop the ginger. Roughly chop the coriander leaves.

3. Heat 2 tsp (10 ml) oil and fry the onions until soft, then add the ginger and fry for another minute.

4. Reduce the heat. Add the chicken livers and fry for 1 minute; add the ground coriander, sugar and tomato purée.

5. Cover and cook over low heat for 5 minutes (if the chicken liver is sticking to the pan add a few spoons of water and stir). Add the fresh coriander leaves, cook for a further 2 minutes, then serve.

According to a very old custom in Madras, a couple are remarried when the man reaches 60 years of age. Their married years are thought of as years of courtship. The wedding arrangements are carried out by the couple's children, and though it is not as elaborate and lengthy a celebration as a first wedding, it is a colourful and happy occasion. The bride wears her old golden or silver wedding sari *and the man dresses in a white silk* jeba *and* vesti. *Music is played on the drum before the ceremony. The husband puts another gold marriage chain or yellow string around his wife's neck, and marks her forehead with red powder. This practice was more common when girls married at the age of thirteen and men of twenty, but the marriage age has changed and these occasions are rare these days.*

Spicy calves' liver

TRIVANDRUM SHUTTURAICHI

8 oz (225 g) fresh calves' liver
¼ tsp turmeric
1 tsp chilli powder
¼ tsp salt (or to taste)
1 small onion
½ inch (1.5 cm) fresh ginger
1 small tomato
ghee
1 tsp (5 ml) tomato purée

People need strength to defend the land or work it – and liver is thought of as strengthening. Calves' liver is generally sweeter than that of the lamb or goat (often eaten in Madras). The spices contrast with it in this sizzling dish.

1. Wash and dry the liver, cut into bite-sized pieces. Cover evenly with the turmeric, chilli powder and salt. Leave to marinate for half an hour.

2. Peel the onion and slice into thin rings. Peel the ginger and crush (with the side of a broad knife-blade) so the flavour will be released during cooking (it should remain a single piece). Coarsely chop the tomato.

3. Heat 2 tsp (10 g) ghee in a saucepan and fry the sliced onion until soft and brown. Then add the marinated liver with the crushed ginger, the tomato and tomato purée. Fry covered for 5–10 minutes, until the liver is cooked.

Spicy lambs' liver

VATHYAR PORICHAR ERAL

8 oz (225 g) lambs' liver
½ tsp turmeric
1 tsp chilli powder
¼ tsp salt (or to taste)
a little oil for frying

In times gone by, the arrival of someone would be celebrated by the slaughter of a goat or lamb for a feast. The liver was always considered a special delicacy. Lambs' liver is delicious when seasoned with chilli powder, turmeric and salt, then simply fried.

1. Thinly slice the lambs' liver. Cover evenly with the turmeric, chilli powder and salt. Leave to marinate for half an hour.

2. Fry the marinated liver in a little oil for 4–5 minutes, and serve.

CHUTNEYS, PICKLES, RELISHES

Traditionally, a Tamil meal will consist of a number of vegetable dishes, plus a chutney, with rice and yogurt. The word *chatani*, or chutney, denotes a tangy mashed or puréed vegetable dish, eaten (warm or cold) towards the end of a meal to enliven the palate. Chutneys swiftly became a favourite of the British, but while English-style chutneys are generally preserves, Indian vegetable chutneys are freshly prepared each day, often from tomatoes or aubergines.

Coconut and mint are both used for a different type of chutney, which goes by the name *thambuli* or *toyal*. Coconut chutney is a traditional accompaniment to dosais (see p. 34), and mint chutney always goes with biryani (see p. 20).

Yogurt-based accompaniments, *pachadis,* are easily prepared and make a cooling, refreshing contrast to fiery or rich dishes.

Other recipes in this chapter are for sauces and pickles that accompany rice, pancakes or snacks – the most frequently prepared of all these is *sambar*, a delicious sauce for dosais (see chapter on Breads and Pancakes), rice or other snacks.

A recipe for lime pickle is also included here, of course.

Yogurt relish

TAYAR PACHADI

1 small onion
2 firm tomatoes
¼ cucumber
1 green chilli
1 tbsp (15 ml) plain yogurt
½ tsp salt
1 tsp sugar
fresh coriander

Tayar pachadi *is a frequent choice of dish at weddings, where it is served alongside biryani, for its simplicity contrasts with the richness of biryani and other rich food. The yogurt in pachadi is also cooling, and good with fiery dishes. This onion and tomato pachadi is very quick and easy to prepare, and a Tamil housewife (who will generally cook two or three vegetable dishes) will often make pachadi if she finds herself running out of time. (In north India, pachadi goes by the name of* raita.*)*

1. Peel and chop the onion. Cut the tomatoes and cucumber into small cubes.

2. De-seed the green chilli and slice thinly. Add to the chopped vegetables.

3. Gently mix in the yogurt, then the salt and sugar. Leave to stand for a short while for the flavours to develop.

4. Serve garnished with fresh coriander.

Most Tamilians speak at least three languages: Tamil, English (which for many years was the official language), and Hindi (the present official language). Tamilians living in Pondicherry speak French as well. People who live near the Andhra border speak Urdu or Telugu, while Tamilians living in Ootacamund speak Malayalam and the local dialect of Verdoid origin. Some Tamil words have been absorbed into the English language – 'chutney' and 'curry' are two examples.

Coconut chutney

TEYNGA THOYAL

¼ oz (8 g) tamarind
half a fresh coconut
3 fresh green chillies
1 tsp split chickpeas (channa dhall)
1 tsp salt
groundnut oil
1 tsp mustard seeds
1 tsp roasted split chickpeas (channa dhall)
½ tsp cleaned split black grams (urad dhall)
4–5 neem leaves
¼ tsp sugar

Coconut chutney is always served with dosais and idlis. The chillies add a touch of fire to the sweetness of the coconut.

1. Infuse the tamarind in 2 tsp (10 ml) hot water for 3 minutes. Strain the liquid and set aside.

2. Finely grate the white pulp of the coconut (in a food processor, if available).

3. De-seed and finely chop the green chillies. Thoroughly wash the unroasted channa dhall. Add both, plus the salt, to the coconut in the food processor, and process until quite smooth.

4. Heat 1 tbsp (15 ml) oil in a saucepan. Fry the mustard seeds, roasted channa dhall, urad dhall and neem leaves. When the mustard seeds pop and the dhall is golden brown, add the ingredients to the ground coconut and tamarind liquid. Add the sugar and serve.

Mint chutney

POODINA

¼ oz (8 g) tamarind
3 green chillies
4 oz (110 g) fresh mint leaves
salt to taste
1 tsp sugar

Fresh coriander and mint are important ingredients in Tamilian cooking, and add a sweetish, refreshing flavour to a meal. In this recipe the addition of tamarind and chillies gives the chutney a little extra bite. It is generally served with biryani, and with various types of pancake. The tamarind acts as a preservative, and poodina can be stored for about a week in the fridge

1. Infuse the tamarind in 4 tbsp (60 ml) hot water for 5 minutes. Strain the liquid and set aside.

2. De-seed and roughly chop the green chillies.

A Tamil woman's main role is that of a mother, and women who do not bear children may be scorned by society – newly married Tamil women are given young coconuts by their mothers and mothers-in-law, as a symbol of fertility.

3. Wash the mint thoroughly and chop roughly. (If the stems are very tough they can be discarded.)

4. Put all the ingredients in a food processor and process to an even consistency. Remove and keep cool.

Aubergine chutney

KATRIKA CHATANI

2 aubergines
2 soft tomatoes
1 medium onion
2 fresh green chillies
2 cloves garlic
3 cloves
1 tsp ground cinnamon
groundnut or grapeseed oil
salt
2 tbsp (30 ml) plain yogurt (if serving cold)
a sprig fresh coriander

Tamilians love to go on picnics at weekends or on festival days. As Madras is near the coast many families go to the seaside and they invariably invite other relatives and their families to go with them.

Chutneys are popular picnic dishes, as they can be eaten hot or cold and are ideal accompaniments to many dishes. This aubergine chutney is always made fresh and is eaten in larger quantities than British-style chutney preserves.

1. Cut the aubergines and tomatoes into fine dice, then place in a pan with ¼ pint (150 ml) water, bring to the boil, and simmer for 5–10 minutes or until cooked.

2. Meanwhile peel the onion and slice finely. De-seed and slice the green chillies. Peel and crush the garlic. Grind the cloves.

3. Drain the cooked vegetables, let them cool slightly, then mash. Leave aside.

4. Heat 1 tbsp (15 ml) oil and fry the onions, green chillies and garlic with the cloves and cinnamon, until soft. Add the mashed aubergines and tomatoes, season with salt to taste and cook for another five minutes.

5. Serve the chutney warm or allow it to cool, then add the yogurt. Garnish with fresh coriander.

Tomato chutney

AKKAS TAKALI CHATANEE

8 oz (225 g) firm red tomatoes (or a mixture of red and yellow tomatoes)
½ oz (15 g) tamarind
6 shallots
2 cloves garlic
½ inch (1.5 cm) fresh ginger
2–3 fresh green chillies (to taste)
1 stem fresh coriander leaves
ghee or oil for frying
asafoetida, a piece the size of a black peppercorn
1 tsp black mustard seeds
1 tsp fenugreek seeds
1 tsp split cleaned black grams (urad dhall)
¼ tsp cumin seeds
¼ tsp turmeric
1 tsp salt
1 oz (30 g) brown sugar

This tomato chutney is delicious, both sweet and piquant. Best served at room temperature, it is a good accompaniment to almost any dish. I like to use both red and yellow tomatoes for my tomato chatanee.

1. Pour boiling water over the tomatoes and allow to stand for a minute or two. Remove their skins and chop coarsely.

2. Infuse the tamarind in 4 tbsp (60 ml) hot water for 5 minutes. Strain and put the liquid to one side.

3. Peel and quarter the shallots. Peel and roughly slice the garlic and ginger. De-seed the chillies.

4. Finely chop the shallots.

5. Grind together the garlic, ginger and fresh green chillies in a food processor, or chop finely and grind with a pestle and mortar.

6. Roughly chop the coriander leaves.

7. In a heavy-based saucepan heat 1 tbsp (15 g) ghee (or oil) until it starts to sizzle. Add the asafoetida, the black mustard seeds, fenugreek seeds, split cleaned black grams and cumin seeds and cook until they pop and turn golden brown – take care that they do not burn. Then add the shallots.

8. Stir in the ground garlic mixture and turmeric, and cook until golden brown.

9. Next add the chopped tomatoes, coriander leaves, tamarind juice, salt and sugar. Reduce the heat, cover the pan and cook for 5 minutes.

10. Serve at room temperature. (It will keep for up to a week in a refrigerator, stored in an airtight container.)

Mango chutney

MAMBALAM MANGAI PRALEKA

3–4 ripe mangoes (12 oz/340 g prepared weight)
12 oz (340 g) soft brown muscavado sugar (equal to weight of prepared fruit)
½ inch (1.5 cm) fresh ginger
4 cloves garlic
2 oz (55 g) dried dates
groundnut oil
2 tsp fenugreek seeds
2 tsp mustard seeds
3 tsp turmeric
1 tsp salt
2 tsp chilli powder
2 oz (55 g) raisins
2 oz (55 g) flaked almonds

Mangoes have three special qualities that have been extolled for nearly 3000 years: they are said to be sacred (their leaves are hung over the threshold on important occasions), help fulfil wishes, and are considered the arrows of Mannatha, the Indian Cupid – so are lucky in matters of love. Mango chutneys were brought back to England by the East India Company. This simple chatani embodies the six tastes which form part of the Indian meal: sweet, sour, bitter, salty, astringent and pungent. This chutney will keep for 2–3 weeks in a refrigerator.

1. Wash and peel the mangoes. Cut into fine cubes, ⅛ inch (3 mm) in size. Weigh the mango cubes, and weigh an equal amount of brown sugar.

2. Peel and finely chop the ginger and garlic. Chop the dates.

3. Heat 2 tbsp (30 ml) oil in a heavy-based saucepan, and fry the fenugreek, mustard seeds and turmeric. Add the mango cubes, then the sugar, chilli powder, garlic, ginger, raisins, dates and almonds. Stir well.

4. Cook gently, stirring occasionally, for an hour over low heat. Cool and serve or store in an airtight jar.

Aubergine with tamarind and coconut

DEVANAYAGAM PULI KOLAMBA

1 onion
2 tomatoes
3 small aubergines
1 oz (30 g) tamarind
ghee
1 tsp fenugreek seeds
2 tsp ground coriander
1 tsp chilli powder
1 tsp salt
¼ pint (150 ml) thick coconut milk

My mother learned this dish from my father's mother, and it always reminds me of happy childhood days. This sauce is a speciality of the Nadar community, and combines coconut with aubergine and sweet-tart tamarind. This rather thin sauce is eaten poured over rice.

1. Peel and chop the onion coarsely. Cut the aubergine into ¼-inch (6-mm) dice, and finely slice the tomato.

2. Infuse the ball of tamarind in 6 tbsp (90 ml) hot water for about 5 minutes. Strain and put this thick liquid to one side, retaining the tamarind pulp. Infuse the same pulp in another 4 tbsp (60 ml) water for 5 minutes. Strain and put this thin liquid to one side, keeping it separate from the first batch. Discard the pulp.

3. Heat 1 tsp (5 g) ghee in a saucepan and fry the fenugreek seeds until the aroma is released and they turn brown. Then add the coarsely chopped onion. Fry until soft and golden brown.

4. Stir in the ground coriander, chilli powder and salt. Add the first (thick) batch of tamarind liquid, and simmer for 3–5 minutes.

5. Add the prepared tomato and aubergines, and ¼ pint (150 ml) water. Simmer for a minute before adding the second infusion of tamarind.

6. Next add the coconut milk and cook for a minute or two.

7. Raise the heat. Add another 4 tbsp (60 ml) water. Bring back to the boil and finish cooking for 10–15 minutes, until the aubergines and tomatoes are soft. The sauce will have a pouring consistency.

Lime pickle

ELAMCHA URGA

MAKES 2 x 8 OZ (225 G) JARS

10 limes
2 tbsp (30 ml) white malt vinegar
1 tbsp salt
2 oz (55 g) brown sugar
8 oz (225 g) dates
4 cloves garlic
1 inch (2.5 cm) ginger
1 tsp cumin seeds
2 tsp mustard seeds
2 tbsp chilli powder

Lime pickle is a preserve, so is not made when required as the chutneys are. It has a sharp, sweet-sour flavour which improves with keeping. The flavour is strong, so the pickle should be used sparingly, a teaspoonful per person at most. Unlike many recipes, which need the limes to stand for several days, this recipe of my mother's speeds up the pickle-making process by pre-cooking the limes.

1. Quarter the limes, removing some or all of the pips. Place in a heavy pan, or wok, with the vinegar, salt and sugar, cover the pan and simmer over a very low heat until the limes have softened (around 15 minutes).

2. Grind the dates, garlic and ginger.

3. Heat 1 tbsp (15 ml) oil and fry the cumin and mustard seeds. Remove from the heat and add the vinegar used to boil the limes.

4. Add the chilli powder, return to the heat, and stir until the chilli has cooked.

5. Slowly add the ground dates, ginger and garlic. Stir well.

6. Finally add the limes and boil for 2 minutes.

7. Allow to cool a little, then pour into heated, sterilised jars. Seal while warm.

The daily life of the Hindu is affected by the five elements: sky, air, water, fire and earth, and by the times of the day: dawn, morning, afternoon, evening, dusk and night. This pickle is generally made around noon. Certain spices, such as chilli, are believed to produce heat in the body, and others to cool it down. Limes and all citrus fruits are considered cooling. Lime pickle, combining chilli and citrus, has both these elements.

Drumstick sambar

RUNGASWAMY MURANGAKAI SAMBAR

1 drumstick
4 oz (110 g) toor dhall
2 cloves garlic
1 tsp turmeric
1 tsp salt
1 oz (30 g) tamarind
1 medium-sized onion
1 tomato
ghee
1 tsp black mustard seeds
2 dried red chillies
1 tsp ground cumin

This is a recipe which reflects the season. In the month of May Tamil women dress in yellow saris and perform the folk dance called the Bhangra, to celebrate the beginning of the Hindi solar year. The sunshine is reflected in the turmeric used in this recipe. Sambar is a rich yellow-coloured, slightly sweet sauce of lentils, flavoured with onion, tamarind, black mustard seed and 'drumsticks' – a long, stick-like vegetable containing a sweet pulp that adds its own unique flavour to the sauce. (Sambar may be made with other vegetables, such as aubergine.) This sauce is traditionally served with rice, and with dosais.

1. Wash and cut the drumstick into 2-inch (5-cm) lengths. Wash the toor dhall. Peel and crush cloves of garlic

2. Place the toor dhall, turmeric and salt in a pan with ¾ pint (450 ml) boiling water. Cook half-covered for 10 minutes, then add the prepared drumsticks and crushed garlic to the lentils. Cover and cook for a further 15 minutes (the dhall should be quite soft).

3. Meanwhile infuse the tamarind in 4 tbsp (60 ml) hot water for 5 minutes. Strain and put the liquid to one side.

4. Peel and slice the onion finely. Chop the tomato.

5. In a saucepan heat 1 tbsp (15 g) ghee and fry the onion until soft. Add the black mustard seeds and continue cooking until the seeds pop.

6. Add the onion mixture, the tamarind juice, dried red chillies, ground cumin and tomato to the dhall mixture, and simmer for another 15 minutes. The sambar should be a fairly thin sauce.

Pepper water

RASSAM

1 tsp black peppercorns
1½ tsp cumin seeds
2 cloves garlic
1 oz (30 g) tamarind
1 tomato
ghee
salt
asafoetida (size of a small marble)
2 neem leaves

An important aspect of the Hindu faith is healing. Peppercorns, known to Tamil Hindus for their healing qualities, are used to make rassam, or 'pepper water' as it is sometimes called. This deliciously aromatic liquid has the acid sweetness of tamarind and the fire of the peppercorns. Rassam is a very thin sauce, traditionally served spooned over rice. Rassam remaining at the end of the meal is often drunk, to cleanse the palate.

1. Grind or crush the black peppercorns, cumin seeds and cloves of garlic together with a pestle and mortar.

2. Meanwhile infuse the tamarind in ¼ pt (150 ml) hot water for 5–10 minutes. Strain and leave the juice aside. Wash and chop the tomato.

3. In a saucepan heat 1 tsp (5 g) ghee. Fry the crushed black peppercorns, cumin seeds and garlic cloves with the asafoetida until there is an aroma. Then pour in the tamarind juice and add salt to taste. Raise the heat and bring to the boil. Add the tomato and neem leaves. Reduce the heat and let it simmer for 2–5 minutes.

TIFFIN

SAVOURY AND SWEET SNACKS, DESSERTS AND DRINKS

No day is complete without tiffin, an afternoon snack, to fill the gap between lunch and dinner. There are mobile carts, coffee shops, sweetshops and cafés on every street in Madras, selling sweets and savouries with coffee and tea. In Tamil cuisine, savoury and sweet snacks are not thought of as separate and distinct, so they are sold together – consequently, this chapter contains a selection of both.

In the West there is plenty of scope for preparing these dishes outside tiffin-time. Many of the savoury tiffin snacks are perfect for picnics or for party buffets, while the sweet tiffin dishes here can be served as desserts, or as sweetmeats with after-dinner coffee.

(A dessert in Madras will often be simply fresh fruit – juicy mangoes, crisp apples, sweet bananas, custard apples, oranges, jackfruits, exotic pomegranates and papayas, sweet grapes, plums and pears, and even strawberries may combine to create a temptingly delightful, delicious and colourful display. Young coconuts sometimes make a dessert by themselves.)

SAVOURIES

Savoury snacks are usually made from very basic ingredients. Some, such as *bondas,* are made from cleaned split black grams (urad dhall). Others, such as *uppuma*, are made from semolina, a wheat product. *Samosas*, deep-fried triangular pastry parcels, are made from self-raising flour and stuffed with meat or vegetables. Eggs are both versatile and cheap, and this chapter begins with several simple and commonly used egg recipes.

Spicy eggs

RAJKUMARAN MASALA MUTTA

4 eggs
1 medium onion
1 clove garlic
½ inch (1.5 cm) fresh ginger
2 ripe tomatoes
oil
1 tsp chilli powder
½ tsp turmeric
salt to taste
1½ tsp ground coriander
½ tsp ground cumin
1 tsp fenugreek seeds
1 oz (30 g) tamarind

Tamilians love cricket as much as the English do, and have equal enthusiasm for the cricket tea! However, the food served has its own Tamilian flavour and instead of sandwiches and hard-boiled eggs, the cricketers in Madras enjoy spicy eggs on pooris, samosas, pakoras, cutlets and sweetmeats. Spicy eggs are ideal for hot lazy days in summer (they also make a more substantial meal, served with rice and a vegetable dish).

1. Hard boil the eggs then cool and shell them.

2. Peel and finely slice the onion. Peel and finely chop the garlic and ginger. Roughly chop the tomatoes.

3. Fry the sliced onion in a little oil until soft. Then add the garlic and ginger and cook until brown.

4. Add the chilli powder, turmeric, salt, ground coriander and ground cumin, and continue frying for 5 minutes.

5. Add the fenugreek seeds and reduce the heat, then add the tomatoes. Cover and simmer until the tomatoes are soft and pulpy.

6. Meanwhile infuse the tamarind in 4 tbsp (60 ml) hot water for 5 minutes. Mix well and strain the liquid. Stir the tamarind liquid into the tomato mixture and add the whole hard-boiled eggs. Increase the temperature and cook the dish for a few minutes. Serve hot.

Madras omelette

CHEYNAIPATTINAM OMELETTE

1 medium onion
2 cloves garlic
1 small tomato
2 fresh green chillies
4 eggs
1 level tsp freshly ground black pepper
salt to taste
1 oz (30 g) butter
sprig fresh coriander

The omelette is a favourite dish in both the East and the West, but omelettes in England, Spain, France or Madras are, of course, delightfully different. Half the fun of cooking is using one's imagination and skill with the ingredients to hand. This is my grandmother's recipe, a truly Tamilian one.

1. Peel and finely chop the onion. Peel and finely chop the garlic. Roughly chop the tomato. De-seed and finely slice the fresh chillies.
2. Break the eggs into a bowl and beat well. Season with salt and black pepper. Then add all the chopped ingredients.
3. Melt the butter in an omelette pan over low heat. When the butter is hot add the mixture and cook gently until the omelette is set and it is golden brown on both sides (turn it half-way through cooking). Remove from the pan and serve hot, garnished with fresh coriander.

Scrambled eggs

KIRKANNA MUTTA

1 medium onion
2 cloves garlic
1 medium tomato
2 fresh green chillies
1 oz (30 g) butter
4 eggs
salt to taste
sprig fresh coriander

I like my eggs scrambled with onions, chillies, tomatoes, garlic and butter in the evening, with dosais (see p. 34). This recipe gives the otherwise bland eggs a bit of bite!

1. Peel the onion and chop finely. Peel and finely chop the garlic. Wash and finely chop the tomato (peel first if preferred). De-seed and finely slice the fresh chillies.
2. Melt the butter over low heat, and add the onion. Fry until soft. Add the garlic, chillies and tomatoes. Finally add the eggs one at a time and mix gently. Salt to taste. Cook, stirring, until scrambled. Remove and serve hot, garnished with fresh coriander.

Bondas

ANNA NAGAR

2 green chillies
3–4 black peppercorns
1 sprig fresh coriander leaves
2 tbsp (30 ml) natural unset yogurt
1 tsp bicarbonate of soda
5 oz (140 g) black gram (urad dhall) flour
1 tsp cumin seeds
¼ tsp salt (or to taste)
oil for deep frying

Bondas are balls of spiced black gram (urad dhall) batter the size of a walnut, deep-fried so they are brown on the outside and creamy soft on the inside. In Madras, they are served in large leaves, and are accompanied by coconut chutney (see p. 116).

1. De-seed and finely chop the green chillies. Lightly crush the black peppercorns with a pestle and mortar. Wash and chop the fresh coriander leaves.

2. Whisk the yogurt in a bowl with 4 fl oz (120 ml) water and the bicarbonate of soda until smooth, then sift in the black gram flour. Add the cumin seeds, crushed black peppercorns, green chillies, coriander leaves and salt. Beat well with a wooden spoon.

3. Heat oil for deep frying. Test the temperature by dropping in a small cube of bread – it should slowly rise to the top, and the oil should not smoke. Drop in 1 tbsp (15 ml) of batter at a time. (Lower the heat, or the outside of the bondas will go brown before they are cooked inside.) Fry the bondas until golden brown. Drain on kitchen paper and serve hot, with coconut chutney.

Samosas with meat filling

KARAJIGE TUVAI

MAKES 24

Ingredients for filling:

8 oz (225 g) minced meat (lamb, chicken or steak)
¼ tsp turmeric
½ tsp chilli powder
salt
½ medium onion
1 clove garlic
⅛ inch (3 mm) fresh ginger
½ red chilli
1 clove
1 cardamom pod
ghee
¼ tsp ground coriander
¼ tsp ground cumin
½ tsp freshly squeezed lime juice

These bring back memories of my college days, sitting beneath the eucalyptus with friends, all of us munching our samosas.

Samosas are deep-fried pastry triangles with a meat or vegetable filling. Lamb, chicken or beef may be used for the filling (usually chosen according to season – lamb in spring or autumn, chicken in summer, beef in the cooler winter).

The pastry of the samosas should be light and crisp, with extra crunch from onion seeds. If the pastry is light enough to the touch it can be folded over twice to get a crispy effect.

◆ Marinate the filling for at least an hour before use.

FILLING

1. Marinate the minced meat with the turmeric and chilli powder and salt to taste for at least one hour.

2. Peel the onion and chop finely. Peel and finely chop the garlic, ginger and red chilli.

3. Grind the cloves and cardamom pods using a coffee grinder or a pestle and mortar.

4. Heat 2 tbsp (30 g) ghee in a pan. Fry the onion until soft and light brown. Add the garlic, ginger and chilli and fry until soft.

5. Add the marinated meat and the ground coriander, cumin, cloves and cardamom pods. Cover the pan and cook for about 10 minutes (if the mixture becomes dry add 1 or 2 tsp hot water).

6. Stir in the lime juice, cook for another minute, then allow to cool.

Ingredients for pastry:

Note: *To obtain the required consistency it is essential to make the dough with water and ghee that are at blood temperature (felt with the little finger they will seem neither hot nor cold).*

8 oz (225 g) self-raising flour
2 tbsp (30 g) ghee
¼ pint (150 ml) water
pinch of salt
1 tsp onion seeds

PASTRY AND ASSEMBLY

1. Mix all the ingredients and knead to a very soft, pliable dough. Cover with a damp cloth or cling film and leave to rest for 10 minutes.

2. To make 24 x 3-inch (8-cm) squares of pastry, divide the pastry into 8 evenly sized balls, roll out each ball to a piece 3 inches (8 cm) wide and 9 inches (23 cm) long. Cut into 3 squares.

3. Fill the squares with the cooked meat mixture (the dough should be very stretchy and easy to handle):

- place a teaspoon of filling in the middle of a square of pastry;
- fold up the bottom right corner diagonally, to a point ¾ inch (2 cm) from the top edge and ¾ inch (2 cm) from the left edge (stretch the dough if necessary);
- moisten the L-shaped border that is formed, fold it over the triangular flap (it will be double thickness at the corner) and seal;
- twist the dough tightly at all three corners, to make a firm little spiky-cornered triangular pasty.

Make the other samosas in the same way.

4. Heat oil for deep frying (check temperature with a cube of bread: it should turn brown immediately when dropped in), or set an electric deep fryer to its hottest temperature. Deep-fry the samosas a few at a time until golden brown. Drain on kitchen paper and serve hot.

Vegetable samosas

NANDANAM KARAJIKAYI

MAKES 18

Ingredients for filling:

1 oz (30 g) shelled peas, fresh or frozen
1 small carrot
1 medium potato
¼ cauliflower
1 oz (30 g) green beans
1 medium onion
2 cloves of garlic
¼ inch (6 mm) fresh ginger
ghee
2 cloves
2 cardamoms
½ tsp turmeric
1 tsp chilli powder
¼ tsp ground cumin
¼ tsp ground coriander
salt
1 tsp (5 ml) freshly squeezed lime juice

Vegetable samosas are generally bigger than meat-filled ones, as the vegetables are not minced but chopped finely. Vegetable samosas are ideal tiffin, since they contain both 'heating' (potatoes, carrots) and 'cooling' (peas, tomatoes) vegetables. Parsnip or swede could be used as an alternative root vegetable.

FILLING

1. Defrost the peas (or any other frozen vegetable) if necessary.

2. Peel and parboil the carrot and the potato separately. Cut into small dice (¼ inch/6 mm).

3. Discard the cauliflower stalks, and cut or break the remainder into tiny florets. Finely chop the green beans. Peel and finely chop the onion, garlic and ginger.

4. Heat 2 tbsp (30 g) ghee in a heavy saucepan. Add the cloves and cardamoms.

5. Add the finely chopped onion and fry until soft and brown. Then fry the garlic and ginger with the onion.

6. Add the turmeric and chilli powder. Fry for 1 minute and then add the diced carrots and potatoes; fry for another 3 minutes until they are nearly soft.

7. Stir in the ground cumin and coriander. If the mixture is dry add 1 tbsp (15 ml) of water.

8. Finally add the green beans and peas, salt to taste, and cook for another 5 minutes.

9. Before the end of cooking stir in the lime juice. Allow to cool.

Ingredients for pastry:

Note: *To obtain the required consistency it is essential to make the dough with water and ghee that are at blood-temperature (felt with the little finger they will seem neither hot nor cold).*

8 oz (225 g) self-raising flour
2 tbsp (30g) ghee
¼ pint (150ml) water
pinch of salt
1 tsp onion seeds
oil for deep frying

PASTRY AND ASSEMBLY

1. Mix all the ingredients and knead to a very soft, pliable dough. Cover with a moist cloth or cling film and leave to rest for 10 minutes.

2. To make 18 x 3½-inch (9-cm) squares of pastry, divide the pastry into 6 evenly sized balls, roll out each ball to a piece 3½ inches (9 cm) wide and 10½ inches (27 cm) long. Cut into 3 squares.

3. Fill the squares with the filling (the dough should be very stretchy and easy to handle):

- place a teaspoon of filling in the middle of a square of pastry;
- fold up the bottom right corner diagonally, to a point ¾ inch (2 cm) from the top edge and ¾ inch (2 cm) from the left edge (stretch the dough if necessary);
- moisten the L-shaped border that is formed, fold it over the triangular flap (it will be double thickness at the corner) and seal;
- twist the dough tightly at all three corners, to make a firm little spiky-cornered triangular pasty.

Make the other samosas in the same way.

4. Heat oil for deep frying (check temperature with a cube of bread: it should turn brown immediately when dropped in), or set an electric deep fryer to its hottest temperature. Deep fry the samosas a few at a time until golden brown. Drain on kitchen paper and serve hot.

Savoury semolina and pulse snack

ATHAI'S UPPUMA

1 medium onion
2 green chillies
sprig of fresh coriander
ghee
4 oz (110 g) coarse semolina
1 tsp split chickpeas (channa dhall)
1 tsp cleaned split black grams (urad dhall)
1 tsp brown mustard seeds
asafoetida (piece the size of a black peppercorn)
2–3 neem leaves
8 fl oz (250 ml) boiling water
1 tsp (5 ml) fresh lime juice
salt

Uppuma *has the texture of coarse breadcrumbs, and is a typical spicy Tamilian tiffin dish. My aunt used to make the most wonderful* uppuma, *and often served it as tiffin on Mondays when she was pressed for time.*

1. Peel and finely chop the onion. De-seed the chillies and slice very finely. Chop the fresh coriander.

2. Heat 1 tbsp (15 g) ghee (preferably in a non-stick pan or wok) and fry the semolina until golden brown. Remove and put aside.

3. Add the onion to the hot ghee and fry until soft but not brown.

4. Add both the grams, green chilli, mustard seeds, asafoetida and halved neem leaves. Fry for a minute, then gradually pour the boiling water onto the mixture, stirring constantly.

5. When the mixture comes to the boil, gradually stir in the fried semolina, then add the lime juice, salt to taste and chopped coriander. Cook, stirring continuously, for about 5 minutes or until the semolina is cooked. The mixture should take on the consistency of coarse breadcrumbs.

Spiced lentil cakes

VADAIS

MAKES ABOUT 12

4 oz (110 g) split chickpeas (channa dhall)
4 oz (110 g) split black grams (urad dhall)
2 small onions
¼ inch (6 mm) fresh ginger
2 green chillies
1 egg yolk
oil
pinch salt
¼ tsp turmeric
2 or 3 neem leaves

Vadais are lentil cakes, a delicious spicy snack sold in coffee shops with hot sweet tea, or chaya.

The mixture is traditionally made without egg, but it makes the dough much easier to handle. Serve with coconut chutney (p. 116) or sambar (p. 122).

◆ The grams and chickpeas need to be soaked for 3 hours (or overnight) before cooking.

1. Soak the grams and chickpeas in water for 3 hours. Rinse and strain. Place in a food processor with 2 tsp (10 ml) water and grind coarsely.

2. Peel the onions and chop finely. Peel and finely chop the ginger. De-seed and finely slice the green chillies. Loosely beat the egg yolk.

3. Heat 1 tsp (5 ml) oil and fry the onion, ginger, green chilli and neem leaves until soft. Add the turmeric and salt, and fry for a minute or two.

4. Add the fried ingredients to the dhall mixture, and add just enough beaten egg yolk to bind the mixture.

5. Form the mixture into walnut-sized balls; flatten them slightly.

6. Heat 1–2 inches (2–4 cm) of oil in a wok, and fry the vadais a few at a time until reddish brown on both sides. Drain on kitchen paper.

Pakoras

ROYAPETTA PAKORAS

MAKES ABOUT 30 PAKORAS

For the batter:
8 oz (225 g) gram flour
¼ tsp baking powder
½ tsp chilli powder
¼ tsp turmeric
2 tsp ground coriander
2 tsp ground cumin
¼ tsp salt (or to taste)
2 tbsp (30 ml) unset natural yogurt
7 fl oz (210 ml) cold water
vegetables: an onion (around 2 oz/55 g), potato (3 oz/85 g) or aubergine (3 oz/85 g) or a mixture of the three
oil for deep frying

Pakoras are eaten all over India, but originated in the South. In the North they are often eaten with a meal (and, confusingly, are sometimes called bhajis), whereas in Tamil Nadu they are eaten as a snack.

These lovely battered vegetables can be prepared with aubergines, onions or potatoes. They are deep-fried until crisp on the outside, and served hot or cold as an appetising crispy snack with drinks, accompanied by coconut or mint chutney (see p. 116).

◆ The batter needs to stand for at least half an hour before use.

1. Prepare the batter. Mix all the dry ingredients in a bowl. Slowly beat in the yogurt, then the water, to form a thick, smooth batter. Beat it well and allow to stand for at least half an hour.

2. Peel the potato and onion, and cut into slices ⅛ inch (2 mm) thick. If they are not to be used immediately, soak in a bowl of salted water to prevent them turning brown. Drain and pat dry before use.

3. Heat 2–3 inches (4–7 cm) oil in a wok or deep fryer – do not allow it to smoke. Beat the batter again lightly. Dip each piece of vegetable in the batter to coat lightly, and fry until golden brown. Drain on kitchen paper. Serve hot or cold, with coconut or mint chutney.

FACING PAGE: *Samosas (pages 128 and 130); vadais (p. 133) and pakoras (p. 134).*

Onion bhajis

VENGAYAM PAGODAS

MAKES ABOUT 10–12

2 large onions (10 oz/285 g in total)
¼ inch (6 mm) fresh ginger
3–4 green chillies
sprig fresh coriander
1 tsp salt
¼ tsp turmeric
½ tsp chilli powder
¼ tsp ground cumin
4 oz (110 g) gram flour
1 tsp (5 ml) groundnut oil, warmed
3 fl oz (90 ml) iced water

for the sauce (optional):
4 tbsp (60 ml) natural yogurt
a few fresh mint leaves

These are a great favourite in the Madras coffee houses. The fine onion rings are mixed into a gram-flour batter, then spoonfuls are deep-fried until crisp and crunchy on the outside and a little softer inside. The secret of the batter is the careful addition of water once the dry ingredients have been mixed thoroughly with a fork or fingertips. As a variation, a few roasted peanuts may be added to the batter before frying.

1. Peel the onions and cut into ⅛-inch (3-mm) slices. Separate each slice into individual rings and place in a mixing bowl.

2. Peel the ginger, and chop finely. De-seed the chillies and slice finely. Wash and roughly chop the coriander. Place all the chopped ingredients in the bowl with the onion rings.

3. Add the salt, turmeric, chilli powder, cumin and gram flour. Mix well with a fork or fingertips.

4. Add the warm oil and water, and mix thoroughly – it should form a thick batter that will fall easily from a spoon. Allow to stand for half an hour.

5. Heat a few inches of oil in a wok or deep fryer. Carefully drop tablespoonfuls of batter into the hot oil and deep fry over medium heat, a few at a time, until crisp and reddish-brown. Remove from the oil and drain on kitchen paper. Best served while still warm, especially with a sauce of a few chopped mint leaves stirred into yogurt.

Chickpeas

VELLANKANI SUNDAL

5 oz (140 g) chickpeas
½ tsp turmeric
salt to taste
oil
10 neem leaves
2 fresh green chillies
1 tsp black mustard seeds
asafoetida (piece the size of a black peppercorn)
coriander leaves
2 level tbsp grated fresh coconut

This dish makes a good accompaniment to a summer meal, or as a titbit with drinks.

Chickpeas are grown near Trichinapalli, famous for its temples and the Red Fort with its mosque, with a dome said to be sculpted in gold. Here, in May each year, a Hindu festival called Pooram *is held to celebrate the new moon. Elephants decked with ceremonial umbrellas bless the pilgrims with their trunks in return for a small donation to the temple. Young boys sell this tasty snack to visitors, for them to munch on their way back to the city.*

1. Soak the dried chickpeas overnight in plenty of water.

2. Rinse the chickpeas and place, with the turmeric and salt to taste, into a heavy-based saucepan or a pressure-cooker, and add enough water to cover them. Cook the chickpeas until tender (around an hour, or 15 minutes under pressure). Strain excess water after cooking and leave aside.

3. Meanwhile wash the neem leaves and remove from their stems. De-seed and slice the fresh green chillies.

4. Heat 1 tsp (5 ml) oil in a saucepan. Fry the mustard seeds until they pop. Then add the asafoetida, sliced green chillies, neem leaves, and chickpeas. Stir-fry for about 5 minutes until the ingredients in the saucepan are mixed well.

5. Remove from the pan, and garnish with fresh coconut and coriander leaves.

Muruku

MAKES ABOUT 24

4 oz (110 g) rice flour
4 oz (110 g) gram flour
4 oz (110 g) plain white flour
1 tsp cumin seeds
1 tsp salt
2 tsp chilli powder
a pinch of ground asafoetida
1 oz (30 g) butter
1 tsp sesame seeds
oil for deep frying

Muruku *are more-ish deep-fried titbits made of gram and rice flour – they are crunchy and delicious and make an excellent snack or pre-dinner nibble with drinks.* Muruku *keep well, for a few days, in an airtight container. They are usually made with a* muruku *press, but an icing bag works just as well.*

1. Sift together the flours, mix well and leave aside.

2. In a heavy-based saucepan combine the water with cumin seeds, salt, chilli powder, ground asafoetida and butter and bring to the boil.

3. When it comes to the boil, remove from the heat and stir in the sesame seeds and half the sifted flour.

4. Add the rest of the flour, stirring until the mixture holds together. Gradually add just enough water to obtain a soft dough. Knead lightly for 1 minute.

5. Flour, or lay a large piece of foil on, the work surface. Place the soft dough into an icing bag with a ¼-inch (6-mm) plain nozzle. Force out dough mixture onto the foil, to form rings or figures-of-eight 2½ inches across.

6. Heat a few inches of oil in a wok for deep frying, over medium heat.

7. Gently slide each muruku onto a fish slice and lower the muruku into the hot oil. Fry until golden brown and crisp (2–5 minutes). Drain well on kitchen paper. Repeat the process until the dough is used up.

8. Cool and store in an airtight container.

SWEETS AND DESSERTS

Sweetmeats are symbols of welcome, love and hospitality, and are eaten at almost any time of day. Sweets are always eaten at religious festivals, which are considered to be happy occasions, when friends and relatives share a feast of sweetmeats and also give them to the poor.

Many sweet dishes are based on milk enriched with nuts of all varieties. Indian ice cream, known as *kulfi*, is a well-known example. Nuts are important for their protein and add richness to sweet dishes. Peanuts, cashew nuts, walnuts, pistachios, almonds and groundnuts are all used. On fast days, when usual meals are abstained from, nuts may be eaten as a substantial meal in themselves.

Other sweet 'puddings' are made of rice (or vermicelli) and milk, or rice and coconut milk – though they are generally eaten as afternoon snacks, they make excellent desserts. Vermicelli, made of durum wheat and semolina, familiar from Italian cooking to many in the West, forms the basis of several sweet dishes, from the everyday sweet vermicelli to the exotic *payasam* – with its delicious combination of sago and vermicelli, raisins, cardamom, sugar and nuts.

Jaggery, palmyra sugar, is used rather than cane sugar, and soft brown muscovado sugar makes the best substitute (white sugar may also be used). Coconuts are in plentiful supply in Madras, and are used in many sweet dishes throughout the year, while cardamom adds flavour to many sweet dishes.

Barfi pista

1 pint (600 ml) fresh full cream milk

2 oz (55 g) each: unsalted shelled pistachio nuts, roasted flaked almonds and unsalted cashew nuts

or 6 oz (170 g) of any one variety

2 oz (55 g) muscovado sugar

3 fl oz (90 ml) water

1 tsp (5 ml) rose-water

2 drops green colouring

This favourite sweetmeat is generally given as a gift upon the birth of a daughter – having sons myself, I would like to dedicate this recipe to my niece, who shares my birthday.

1. Place the milk in a heavy-based saucepan; over a very low heat reduce it to ⅙ of its original amount stirring occasionally – this will take up to an hour.

2. Roast the nuts; crush them and set aside.

3. Combine the sugar and water. Heat to 210°F/99°C to make a thick syrup. Cover and keep warm.

4. When the milk is reduced to ⅙ its original volume, add the syrup and nuts, colouring and rose-water. Stir until the sweetmeat leaves the edges and holds together.

5. Press the mixture in a greased tray. Cut into squares when cool.

Jalebis

4 oz (110 g) gram (besan) flour or self-raising flour

1 oz (30 g) rice flour

4 oz (110 g) coarse semolina

pinch of salt

1 oz (30 g) butter or ghee

2 tbsp (30 ml) natural unset yogurt

1 oz (30 g) fresh yeast

4 fl oz (120ml) tepid water

a pinch of saffron strands

forcing bag with ¼-inch (6-mm) plain nozzle

chopped roasted almonds (optional)

icing sugar (optional)

Jalebis are a deliciously light, orange-coloured spiral sweetmeat that is either eaten hot with syrup as a dessert or cold and sprinkled with icing sugar as a snack during the day.

The batter is piped straight into hot oil. (It may be useful to have a 'sous-chef' the first time you make these, as the procedure is rather fiddly.)

◆ The batter needs to stand overnight before use

1. Sift the selected flour and rice flour into a mixing bowl (preferably of a food mixer). Add the semolina and salt. Melt the butter or ghee and add to the flour. Mix in the yogurt, melted butter, yeast, and 4 fl oz (120 ml) water, and beat until it reaches the consistency of thick cream (add extra water if required). Cover and leave overnight in a refrigerator to ferment.

2. Make the syrup, if using (see below).

3. Infuse the saffron strands in 2 tsp (10 ml) water for 5 minutes, then add the liquid and strands to the batter.

4. Prepare an icing bag for use. Heat a few inches of oil in a wok or deep fryer over medium heat. Fill the icing bag with some batter. Drop half a teaspoon of the batter into the oil to test the temperature – it should sizzle but not go dark brown instantly. Adjust the temperature if necessary. Then pipe a few figures-of-eight or spirals of batter into the hot oil. The batter will set and turn pale gold and crisp. Quickly remove from the oil and drain on kitchen paper.

5. Immerse the warm jalebis in the warm syrup for a minute, then remove.

6. Continue until all the mixture is used.

7. To serve jalebis warm, in syrup, sprinkle with chopped roasted almonds. If serving cold, sprinkle with icing sugar. They will keep for a while in an airtight jar.

for the syrup:

2 cloves

2 cardamom pods

4 oz (110 g) light muscovado or caster sugar

8 fl oz (250 ml) water

1 tbsp (15 ml) freshly squeezed lime juice

SYRUP

1. Crush the cloves with a pestle and mortar.

2. Remove the seeds from the cardamom pods. Discard the pods and crush the seeds.

3. Heat the water in a pan and dissolve the sugar in it. Add the crushed cloves and cardamom seeds, and the lime juice. Raise the heat. Boil until the syrup is slightly caramelised (190°F/88°C). Remove from the heat.

Gulab jamus

4 oz (110 g) full-cream powdered milk

4 oz (110 g) ground almonds

1 tbsp plain flour

1 tbsp baking powder

8–10 tbsp fresh milk

2 cups muscovado sugar

4 cups water

4 tbsp (60 ml) rose-water

ghee for deep frying

Sweetmeats such as gulab jamus *may be served as desserts. They are made with very basic and simple ingredients – milk, flour and ground almonds – and served in a light syrup, either hot or cold. Gulab jamus are eaten all over India. Bear in mind that they are very rich and are best eaten in small quantities.*

1. Sift together the milk powder, ground almonds, plain flour and baking powder.

2. Add enough milk and mix well to form a soft dough. Leave aside for an hour, covered with a tea-towel.

3. Meanwhile make a syrup by boiling the sugar with the water and rose-water until the syrup thickens (190°F/88°C).

4. Form the dough into walnut-sized balls. Deep fry them a few at a time in hot ghee over medium heat until golden brown – the gulab jamus cook extremely quickly and burn easily, so you will need to stay by them the whole time; make up all the dough into balls before frying starts.

5. Drain the gulab jamus on kitchen paper. Put them in hot syrup and allow them to soak for half an hour before serving.

Kulfi

2 eggs

1 oz (30 g) blanched pistachio nuts or almonds

1 pint (600 ml) full-cream milk

2 oz (55 g) caster sugar

4 tbsp (60 ml) double cream

1 tsp (5 ml) rose-water

3 drops of green colouring (optional)

To serve: wafer biscuits

This is the well-known and popular ice cream dessert eaten throughout India. I would like to dedicate this recipe to my students in my classes.

1. Separate the eggs. Lightly beat the yolks, reserve the whites.

2. Quarter, or roughly chop, the nuts.

3. In a large, heavy-based saucepan heat the milk over a low flame until some of the liquid has evaporated (do not allow to boil). Add the sugar and cream, stirring until sugar dissolves. Reduce the heat. Add the rose-water, nuts, egg yolks and colouring (optional).

4. Continue simmering for a further 5 minutes, beating the mixture with a wooden spoon.

5. Bring to the boil. Pour the mixture into a metal tray. Allow to cool, then freeze until three-quarters set.

6. Whisk the egg whites in a large bowl, until stiff. Remove the tray from freezer and fold the contents into the egg whites. Pour the mixture back into the tray. Freeze until set. Serve with wafers.

Curd cheese quenelles in syrup

RASAGULLAS

MAKES 8 (ALLOW 2 PER PERSON)

4 oz (110 g) curd cheese (quark) or ricotta
2 oz (55 g) coarse semolina
1 tsp baking powder
8 almonds
9 fl oz (260 ml) water
3 oz (85 g) caster sugar
1 tsp rose-water

Tamilian men shower their wives with boxes of sweetmeats on birthdays and wedding anniversaries. Women give rasagullas *to their husbands when a son is born, and they distribute them to family members and friends. Curd cheese (quark) and ricotta are suitable for rasagullas.*

1. Mix the curd cheese or ricotta with the semolina and baking powder to form a pliable mixture. Knead into a soft dough. Form into walnut-size balls. Push an almond into the centre of each ball, and close the dough over the opening. Cover and set aside. Have four dessert dishes ready for use.

2. In another large pan heat the water and dissolve the sugar in it. Raise the heat and boil the syrup for 10 minutes (170°F/76°C), until it is pale gold in colour. Transfer a third of the syrup into a heat-proof container, stir in the rose-water and allow to cool. Keep the remaining syrup simmering over low heat.

3. Lower the rasagullas into the simmering syrup, and poach until they increase in size and sink (around 10–15 minutes). Remove from the syrup with a slotted spoon and place two in each dessert dish. Spoon a little of the cooled syrup over the rasagullas and serve.

Payasam

8 fl oz (250 ml) water
4 oz (110 g) whole sago
2 oz (55 g) shelled, unsalted cashew nuts
4 cardamom pods
8 oz (225 g) vermicelli
½ tsp salt, or to taste
1 pint (600 ml) milk
8 oz (225 g) light muscovado sugar
1 oz (30 g) raisins
1 oz (30 g) ground almonds

The special taste of payasam comes from the combination of vermicelli, sago, cardamoms, raisins, milk and sugar. It is rich and a little goes a long way. Payasam is the classic dessert at weddings and other special functions.

1. Boil the water and add sago to it. Keep stirring, so that it does not stick to the pan, until the whole sago becomes translucent. Lower the heat and simmer for 10–15 minutes.

2. Fry the cashew nuts and cardamom pods in ghee.

3. Break the vermicelli into lengths of about ½ inch (1.5 cm). Add to the cashew nuts and cardamoms and fry until brown.

4. Add the fried ingredients to the simmering sago with the salt, milk, sugar and raisins.

5. When the mixture thickens slightly add the ground almonds.

6. Stir for a minute or two. Serve hot.

Green gram payasam

PACHAI PARPU PAYASAM

4 oz (110 g) green grams (moong dhall)
1 cardamom
4 tbsp (60 ml) thick coconut milk
4 tbsp (60 ml) fresh milk
2 oz (55 g) sugar

This payasam *makes use of another pulse found in Madras, green grams (moong dhall). Green gram payasam, cooked in rich coconut milk and sugar, is appealing to schoolchildren on cold wet days when they come home hungry.*

◆ The grams need to be soaked for 4–5 hours or overnight.

1. Soak the green grams overnight. Simmer in plenty of water over a low heat until soft (15–20 minutes).

2. Split open the cardamom and discard the pod.

3. When the green grams are soft, drain if necessary and add the coconut milk, fresh milk, sugar and cardamom seed. Cook for another 10 minutes. Serve hot.

Pongal

1 cup (8 fl oz or 250 ml) short-grain rice

½ cup (4 fl oz or 120 ml) green grams (moong dhall)

2 oz (55 g) shelled, unsalted cashew nuts

2 or 3 cardamom pods

2 tbsp (60 g) ghee

3 cups (750 ml) water

pinch of salt

4–5 oz (110–140 g) brown sugar (muscovado)

2 oz (55 g) grated coconut

1 oz (30 g) raisins

Pongal *is the harvest festival held in January. It is also a sweet rice dish, served for breakfast or as a dessert on the day of the harvest festival from which it takes its name. Children love the taste and anyone who enjoys rice pudding will like this.*

1. Wash rice and green grams together. Drain and leave aside. Chop the cashew nuts. De-seed the cardamom pods and throw the pods away.

2. In the ghee fry the drained rice and green grams. Add water and bring to the boil. Then add a pinch of salt, sugar, grated coconut and cardamom seeds and stir gently. Lower the heat and cook until the rice and green grams are cooked.

3. Fry the cashew nuts. Just before the rice is cooked add the cashew nuts and the raisins. Serve hot.

Sweet vermicelli

PREMALAR

4 oz (110 g) vermicelli

ghee

1 oz (30 g) shelled, unsalted cashew nuts

2 oz (55 g) demerara sugar

¼ tsp salt (or to taste)

½ pint (300 ml) fresh milk

Milk and its products are important to Tamilians as they are considered pure. This milk pudding is easy to prepare and is always a favourite – it is ideal for the chilly British climate.

1. Break up the vermicelli into lengths of around ¼ inch (6 mm). Fry in 1 tbsp (15 g) ghee until brown. Remove and leave aside.

2. Fry the cashew nuts until brown in the ghee. Add the vermicelli with the sugar, salt and milk.

3. Simmer and cook until the vermicelli is soft and the mixture has the consistency of pouring custard. Serve hot.

Ponni

3 oz (85 g) long-grain rice
1 oz (30 g) blanched almonds
2 pints (1.2 litres) milk
6 oz (170 g) muscovado sugar
4 cardamom pods
2 oz (55 g) sultanas
pinch of salt
1 tsp (5 ml) rose-water
12 satsuma segments

Ponni rice – long-grain rice cooked with milk, sugar, nuts and raisins – can be either served as a hot pudding or added to peeled segments of oranges and chilled to make a cold dessert for parties. It is a great favourite among Tamilians.

1. Wash and soak the rice in water for 30 minutes. Drain. Meanwhile chop the blanched almonds. Pour the milk into a heavy-based saucepan and add the rice. Bring to the boil and, stirring all the time, cook until the rice is almost soft and a creamy consistency is reached.

2. Then add the sugar and keep stirring until it dissolves. Next add the cardamom pods, chopped almonds, sultanas, a pinch of salt and the rose-water. Keep cooking until a nice consistency is reached. Remove and serve hot immediately or allow to cool completely.

3. If serving cold, peel the satsuma segments and remove their seeds. Place in individual bowls and add the cooled rice mixture. Chill well before serving.

FACING PAGE: *Ponni; gulab jamus (p. 141) and jalebis (140).*

Mandavalli dessert

1 oz (30 g) mild Cheddar cheese
1 x 5-oz (160-ml) can evaporated milk
1 oz (30 g) currants
1 oz (30 g) shelled roasted flaked almonds
1 oz (30 g) shelled unsalted pistachio nuts
pinch nutmeg
2 cardamom pods
1–2 saffron strands
silver paper to decorate

In my family, there is a tradition that someone from each generation creates his or her own special dish. I chose to make a sweet dish. Like all Tamilians, I believe life has many sweet moments and this is one of them! This dessert is filled with the milk of human kindness, the richness of fruit and nuts, and a taste of spice. It is extremely simple to make and tastes absolutely wonderful.

1. Finely grate the cheese, then mix together with the other ingredients and whisk lightly. Place in the freezer for 2–3 hours. Remove from the freezer half an hour before serving.

Mysore pakh

4 fl oz (120 ml) water
8 oz (225 g) caster sugar
4 oz (110 g) gram flour
8 oz (225 g) unsalted butter
½ tsp grated nutmeg

This is a creamy fudge with a slight taste of nutmeg. As its name suggests, this recipe originally came from Mysore, which at one time was a part of the state of Madras. It is still a favourite with Tamilians today. As with any fudge, it may be kept for some time.

1. Heat the water in a large pan and dissolve the sugar in it. Raise the heat and boil until it is the colour of light honey (190°F/99°C). Remove from the heat and leave aside.

2. Sift the gram flour. Melt half the butter in a heavy-based saucepan over a low heat, gradually add the gram flour and fry, stirring continuously, for 3 minutes. Then gradually stir in the syrup until it is used up.

3. Next add the remaining butter, a tablespoonful at a time. Stir the mixture before adding the next tablespoonful. Cook, stirring frequently, until the mixture comes away from the sides of the pan and the butter oozes out. Remove from the heat.

4. Spread the mixture into a greased tray (around 8 x 10 inches/ 20 x 25 cm). Tilt it to one side and drain off any excess butter. Sprinkle with grated nutmeg and cut into squares. Serve warm or cold.

Sweet potato balls

CHAKKRAVALLI KELANGA

2–3 sweet potatoes (1 lb/450 g)
1 oz (30 g) sugar, white or brown
2 oz (55 g) grated fresh coconut

Trays of specially prepared sweetmeats are exchanged between friends and neighbours during religious festivals particularly at Duvali and Christmas. This special snack is given to children at this time, since this is the only time when sweet potatoes are available. The soft mashed sweet potatoes are rolled in fresh grated coconut and sugar, and are absolutely delicious!

1. Wash the sweet potatoes thoroughly. Boil them in water until tender, then remove them from the water, remove the skins and mash the potatoes.
2. Add the sugar and fresh grated coconut. Form into balls and serve them hot or cold.

Casari

3 oz (85 g) brown or white sugar.
½ pint (300 ml) hot water
a few strands of saffron
2 cardamoms
3 oz (85 g) ghee
8 oz (225 g) coarse semolina
2 oz (55 g) cashew nuts
4 fl oz (120 ml) milk
2 oz (55 g) sultanas
1 oz (30 g) almonds
salt to taste

Casari is a golden-yellow sweet made of milk, sugar, cashew nuts and cardamoms, and has always been a firm favourite. Casari is always eaten on the special day each year when Tamil women eat only cold food and pray for the well-being of their children.

1. Combine the sugar and hot water in a pan over a low heat, stirring, until the syrup takes on a golden colour (170°F/77°C). Remove from the heat and leave aside.
2. Soak the saffron strands in 1 tsp (5 ml) hot water. Open the cardamoms and discard the pods.
3. Fry the semolina in ghee until brown. Remove and leave aside. Fry the cashew nuts in the same ghee until browned, return the semolina to the pan. Add the syrup, milk, cardamom seeds, sultanas and softened saffron strands. Cook, stirring, over a low heat until the mixture thickens, then spread in a buttered dish; decorate it with the almonds. Allow to cool for half an hour, then cut into squares.

Cashew or chestnut candy

VEDANAYAGAM MUTTAI

2 cardamoms
8 oz (225 g) cashew nuts or chestnuts (shelled weight)
6 fl oz (175 ml) hot water
4 oz (110 g) muscovado or caster sugar
2 tsp (10 ml) rose-water
2 oz (55 g) butter
a trace of butter to grease the tray

Cashew nuts, brought to Madras by the Portuguese, are sweet with a milky taste. Ground, they are made into a candy which is eaten at the celebration for a baby's first tooth. Chestnuts are even sweeter, and make a nice brown candy for Christmas and Duvali (New Year). This is dedicated to all my friends.

1. Open the cardamoms, and discard the pods.
2. Peel the chestnuts, if using. Roast the chestnuts or cashew nuts in a hot oven or heavy frying-pan until golden brown, then chop very finely or grind coarsely in a food processor.
3. Heat 6 fl oz (175 ml) water in a heavy saucepan. Dissolve the sugar in it. Stirring well, add the rose-water, butter and cardamom seeds and continue to boil to a thick syrup (210°F/99°C). Remove the pan from the heat.
4. Stir the groundnuts into the thick syrup. Stir until the mixture holds together and starts to come away from the sides of the pan.
5. Place the mixture in a greased tray. Allow to cool, then cut into squares. Serve warm or cold.

DRINKS

Sweet yogurt shake

MAJJIKA

½ cup (125 ml) natural yogurt
1½ cups (375 ml) cold water
2–3 tbsp granulated sugar
1 tsp (5 ml) rose-water

Children sometimes add sugar and fruit to yogurt and have it as a cooling snack in the summer. Here, it makes a deliciously cool drink.

1. Place all ingredients in a blender and blend at high speed until frothy. Remove and chill. Serve when required.

Spiced buttermilk

MORRU

½ pint (300 ml) natural yogurt
1 pint (600 ml) water
2 tsp (10 ml) grapeseed oil
½ tsp cumin seeds
asafoetida (piece the size of a black peppercorn)
a sprinkling of turmeric
salt to taste
two fresh coriander or neem leaves

A jug of buttermilk is often drunk at the end of a Tamilian meal, either spiced or just chilled. It is an ideal accompaniment to spicy food or on hot summer days. Traditionally, butter is made from yogurt (curds) rather than fresh milk. Buttermilk is made by combining curds and water, then churning them in an earthenware pot, using a special ridged stick until the solids turn to butter. The remaining buttermilk is then spiced, and drunk at mealtimes. This buttermilk is simply made by whisking the yogurt and water, then adding the spices.

1. Dilute the yogurt with the water and mix well.
2. Heat the oil in a saucepan and add the cumin seeds. When they pop add the asafoetida, turmeric, salt and fresh coriander or neem leaves, and cook for about a minute or two. Pour the mixture into the buttermilk. Chill before serving.

Fresh lime juice

RAGA

1 tsp granulated sugar
hot water
1 lime
¾ glass of cold water

In summer in Madras lime juice is often sold from mobile carts to passers-by. It is a very refreshing thirst-quencher, the Indian version of citron pressé. The limes used in Madras are almost yellow, and quite sweet. Add more sugar if the limes you use seem sour.

1. Place the sugar in a glass. Add 1 tsp (5 ml) hot water to dissolve the sugar.
2. Squeeze the lime, and add the juice to the syrup in the glass. Top up the glass with cold water, and serve.

Spiced tea

CHAR MASALA

2 cloves
3 green cardamoms
6 cups (1.5 litres) water
1 tsp Nilgiri tea (or Darjeeling)
sugar to taste

Spiced tea is an acquired taste but a soothing drink. It must be drunk very hot. I would like to dedicate this recipe to my husband Bob, who gave me my first English cup of tea and taught me how to make tea in the English way. (Tea from the Nilgiris is available here from specialist suppliers – it has a delicate and slightly perfumed flavour.)

1. Grind the cloves and cardamoms together in a pestle and mortar.
2. Place the water in a pan. Rub the tea-leaves with the tips of your fingers to help release the aroma.
3. Add them to 6 cups water and bring to the boil. Then add the ground spices and sugar to taste.
4. Cover and boil for a few seconds. Remove and serve very hot.

Scented chilled tea

CHAYA KADOHI

6 cups (1.5 litres) water
1 tsp Nilgiri tea (or Darjeeling)
sugar to taste
1 tsp (5 ml) rose-water
2–3 fresh lovage leaves

You may prefer this refreshing but gentler recipe made with rose-water and lovage leaves.

1. Place the water in a pan. Rub the tea-leaves with the tips of your fingers to help release the aroma.
2. Add them to the water and bring to the boil. Boil for 2 minutes, then add sugar to taste and the rose-water.
3. Cover and boil for a few seconds. Allow to cool, then chill. Add the lovage leaves before serving.

GLOSSARY OF SPICES
AND OTHER INGREDIENTS

ANISEED was brought to India from Persia during the Moghul period. The seeds are white and oval in shape, and have a distinctive, sweetish and very aromatic flavour

ASAFOETIDA is the solidified sap of the *Ferula foetida*. It is very strongly flavoured (reminiscent of onion or truffle) and should be used in small quantities, in conjunction with onion and garlic. It is sold in three forms: 'tears' (drops of hardened resin, flattened), 'mass' and powder (often mixed with yellow colouring). When asafoetida is called for in these recipes, I have assumed the use of the mass, usually rolled to form a ball the size of a black peppercorn.

ATTA flour is also sold as chappati flour, or as *godimai*. It is an unrefined, wholewheat flour, very finely ground, and is easily available from Indian stores. Wholewheat flour is not a good substitute as it contains more of the grain and is much coarser in texture than atta. If atta is not available, use wheatmeal flour (bear in mind when making doughs that this will absorb more water than atta).

AUBERGINES are available in many varieties in India, and are generally small (around the size of a small pear). When my recipes call for small aubergines, this is the size intended – the large aubergines usually sold here are the equivalent of around three small aubergines.

BANANA LEAVES are used as wrappings for food and as disposable plates in restaurants and at large functions. They are also used to wrap fish before it is baked or barbecued, and impart a delicious flavour to it. It is hard to obtain banana leaves here, especially in small quantities.

BESAN FLOUR, see GRAM FLOUR

BITTER GOURD (KARELI) is bright green, about 5 or 6 inches (13–15 cm) long and has a knobbly skin. The inside is white or orange with small seeds, which are also edible. As the name implies, the vegetable is bitter.

BLACK GRAMS, see DHALL, URAD

BLACK MUSTARD SEEDS, see MUSTARD SEEDS

CARDAMOM is a member of the ginger family. The pods contain black seeds. Cardamoms are gathered from wild plants native to the moist forests of south India. They have a warm, slightly pungent flavour. There are two varieties, white bleached ones and the more popular green, unbleached cardamom. In some recipes, only the cardamom seed is used, and the empty pods discarded.

CHANNA DHALL, see DHALL

CHILLI is like the goddess Kali, both a creator and destroyer. Used well it gives a pleasant flavour, but misused it can cause some pain! The heat of chillies is considered in India as purifying. The quantity of chilli should always be modified to suit personal taste.

Chillies are not native to Asia – they were brought from South America by the Portuguese, and were swiftly adopted in India, as they are easy to grow and more fiery than black pepper. Chillies come in many shapes and sizes, and are green or red. Red chillies may be dried, and dried red chillies may be ground to a powder.

FRESH CHILLIES should always be plump and shiny – as a general rule, the smaller the chilli, the more fiery it is. Green ones are used fresh in vegetable, fish and meat dishes. Red chillies are sweeter than green, as they have ripened. Generally fresh chillies need to be slit open, their seeds carefully scraped out with a knife, then to be sliced extremely finely before use. Do take care as chilli juice is a strong irritant. Hands need to be washed immediately after preparing chillies, before inadvertently touching the eyes, for example.

DRIED RED CHILLIES give their own special flavour when cooked in hot oil.

CHILLI POWDER should not be kept too long, and should always be cooked thoroughly, not added at the end of cooking. It should be fried over low heat, otherwise it can give a bitter flavour. When buying chilli powder, take care that it is 100% chilli (some brands, intended for Mexican cooking, add other spices to make a chilli mix – if in difficulties, choose cayenne).

CINNAMON is one of the most important Indian spices, and native to the Malabar coast. It consists of sticks of the inner bark of branches, found beneath the outer layer of cork-like bark. It has a warm, agreeable taste and is used in sweet and savoury dishes. These recipes generally specify the length of cinnamon stick required, and the piece is generally cooked whole. It can easily be ground in a coffee grinder, if ground cinnamon is called for.

COCONUT. The white coconut flesh is grated and sometimes used in vegetables dishes, or to make the famous coconut chutney that accompanies dosais, idlis and other savouries. The liquid in the middle is referred to as coconut water. COCONUT MILK is completely different – it is prepared by infusing grated coconut in hot water, then squeezing out the milky liquid formed (see below).

When buying a coconut always check for cracks and mould. There should be plenty of liquid inside.

Coconuts are split into halves easily with the claw of a hammer. Modern Tamilians use a hand grater or a scraper similar to a butter scoop or a food processor. Prise off the edge with a sharp knife and peel the brown skin with a potato peeler. Cut into small pieces and process to a pulp in a food processor. If using a food processor with a grating plate, there is no need to remove the brown skin – place the piece of coconut with the skin is facing upwards and stop grating once the flesh has gone through (remove the skin before grating the next piece, of course). It doesn't matter if the grated coconut is slightly pulpy. Grated coconut may be frozen and used whenever required.

Tamilians use three thicknesses of coconut milk in cooking. THIN COCONUT MILK is used during cooking whereas the THICK MILK is stirred in at the end. COCONUT CREAM (this is not to be confused with purchased blocks of cream of coconut) is used in making sweetmeats. The thickness of the milk obtained is dependent on the quantity of water used to infuse the coconut. Coconut milk can also be made using blocks of CREAM OF COCONUT or packets of DRIED COCONUT MILK.

Many recipes call for both thick and thin coconut milk. Generally the coconut flesh is infused twice – the first infusion produces the thick milk, which is put aside, and the second infusion produces the thin milk. However, if the recipe requires no thick milk, thin milk may be made from a smaller quantity of flesh – see below:

MAKING COCONUT MILK FROM FRESH COCONUT:

Adjust these quantities to suit each recipe, but keep the proportions the same. A whole fresh coconut usually yields about 9 oz (255 g) grated flesh.

To make ¼ pint (150 ml) thick milk:
infuse 9 oz (255 g) grated coconut in ¼ pint (150 ml) hot water for 5 minutes. Strain through muslin.

To make ½ pint (300 ml) thin milk:
infuse EITHER the used grated coconut OR 4½ oz (125 g) fresh grated coconut in another ½ pint (300 ml) hot water. Strain through muslin.

MAKING COCONUT MILK FROM DRIED COCONUT MILK:
(refer to manufacturer's instructions)
To make 4 fl oz (120 ml) thick milk:
place 1 oz (30 g) powder in a measuring jug and mix in water up to the 4 fl oz (120 ml) mark.

To make 4 fl oz (120 ml) thin milk:
place ½ oz (15 g) powder in a measuring jug and mix in water up to the 4 fl oz (120 ml) mark.

MAKING COCONUT MILK FROM BLOCK CREAM OF COCONUT:
(refer to manufacturer's instructions)
To make 4 fl oz (120 ml) thick milk:
place 1¼ oz (35 g) chopped block in a measuring jug with water up to the 4 fl oz (120 ml) mark.

To make 4 fl oz (120 ml) thin milk:
place ¾ oz (20 g) chopped block in a measuring jug with water up to the 4 fl oz (120 ml) mark.

Coconut cream (for sweets) is made as for thick milk by any of the methods above, but using only half the quantity of water.

CORIANDER leaves are added to many dishes towards the end of cooking, and make an attractive garnish. The leaves from one or two sprigs are generally sufficient. Coriander is widely available, and can also be grown outdoors in summer.

CORIANDER seeds, *dhaniya*, are round and beige coloured. Where ground coriander is called for, it can easily be prepared in a coffee grinder.

CUMIN, or *jeera* seeds are crescent-shaped and have a distinctive heavy, strong aroma and a warm taste reminiscent of caraway.

CURDS, see yogurt

DHALL is the term given to pulses, or grams (split peas and lentils). It also refers to cooked pulses. The Tamilian name for dhall is *parpu*. Here the Hindi names are given first, rather than Tamil ones, as they will be more useful when shopping.

CHANNA DHALL, *channeh*, Bengal gram or split sweated chickpeas is wrinkled and dark brown before it is hulled. Once the skin is removed the bright orange or yellow pea is sweated. This dhall is high in protein and has a nutty flavour. It may need pre-soaking to speed the cooking process. It is an essential ingredient for the vadais, and is sometimes used in vegetable dishes if urad dhall is not available.

MASOOR DHALL is the name given to the red lentils that are familiar in Britain. They are little used in Madras, but may be used if toor dhall is unavailable (see below).

MOONG DHALL is known by the Tamil name *pachai parpu*, or green grams. These are small, slightly oval-shaped, and bright olive green. Moong dhall is one of the pulses used in sweet dishes. As the skin is fairly tough the dhall needs to be soaked overnight before cooking.

TOOR DHALL, or *toovar dhall* (red grams), is the most-used dhall in Madras. This pulse grows on a short plant with yellow flowers, which form pods that generally hold three peas. The characteristic red skin of the dhall is generally removed before sale, and the dhall has a rich, earthy yellow colour. The dhall remains whole when cooked and takes 20–30 minutes to soften (cooking time may be reduced by soaking the dhall for an hour before use). Red lentils (*masoor dhall*) may be used as a substitute, though the cooking time will be less and the quantity of water will need to be reduced.

URAD DHALL is known by the Tamil name *ulandu*, or as split black grams, and is a key ingredient in masala dosais, idlis and vadais. Urad dhall is sold with its black husk intact, or with it removed (sometimes called 'snow white lentils'. The recipes here require the hulled, white, variety.

URAD DHALL FLOUR, or *ulandu* flour, is used for another savoury, bondas.

DRUMSTICKS, or MURANGAIKA, are vegetables native to South India. They are similar to long green beans, but are often a foot long – they are now available in this country in some Indian stores. The flavour is quite close to that of asparagus. Drumsticks need to be topped and tailed and cut into 2-inch (5-cm) pieces, and most will need to have stringy parts of their skins removed before cooking. The best way to eat drumsticks is by picking up the pieces as if they were asparagus, eating the best bits and discarding anything tough.

FENUGREEK SEEDS, or METHI, are yellowish brown in colour, have a strong aroma and have a sweetish and somewhat bitter taste reminiscent of burnt sugar. They are native to southern Europe. The fenugreek seeds turn sweetish when dried in hot oil and are used particularly in fish dishes. Young fenugreek plants, similar in taste to spinach, are grown as pot herbs in Madras by Tamilian women and the small green leaves are used as a vegetable or a garnish. The leaves, when dried, are used as a herb.

GHEE is clarified butter, with all milk solids removed, and is used throughout India. Ghee may be heated to very high temperatures without burning, and food may be cooked crisp (food also absorbs less fat at high temperatures).

Ghee may be bought in blocks or in tins, and it need not be kept in the refrigerator. At room temperature ghee is easily spooned out.

All the recipes in this book requiring ghee specify measurements in spoons, followed by a gram weight, e.g. 1 tbsp (15 g) ghee, for simplicity.

Note: 1 TBSP (15 ML) GHEE WEIGHS 15 G OR ½ OZ.

GINGER is an extremely important ingredient in Tamilian cooking. Fresh root ginger is now readily available here. Quantities are specified by length, for example ½ inch (1.5 cm) ginger, assuming that

it will be cut from a piece around ¾ inch (2 cm) in diameter. (If the piece of root being used is much thicker or thinner, adjust accordingly.)

GRAM FLOUR, or BESAN, is a yellow flour made from chickpeas. It mixes easily with water to form a batter for deep-fried snacks, such as onion bhajis, and is used in sweetmeats.

GRAMS, see DHALL

JAGGERY resembles brown sugar, and is the crystallised juice of the palmyra palm. Jaggery has a distinct taste and texture, and the nearest substitute is light muscovado sugar. However, jaggery is available from Indian grocers, usually in round or cylindrical shapes.

KEWRA WATER is a dilute form of kewra, an essence extracted from the screwpine. It is used in sweets, but in general I prefer to use rose-water.

LIMES are readily available in England, but lemons may be substituted (however, remember that limes are generally smaller than lemons, so reduce the quantity if lemons are used).

LOVAGE SEEDS, *carom* or *ajwain* are native to southern Europe and they have a sweetish, liquorice taste.

MACE is the lacy covering on the outside of a nutmeg shell. It is usually sold powdered, but can be bought whole.

MARROWS. Indian stores sell many different varieties of marrow, usually smaller than the British variety.

MASALA has many meanings – it can refer to a spice mixture or to a dish cooked with the mixture. In Madras, a wet masala can be made from crushed and ground onions, ginger, garlic and chillies (such a mixture forms the basis of many of my recipes). A dry masala (spice blend) may be used to coat meat before it is grilled on a barbecue or baked in an oven.

MILK, POWDERED. Some of the recipes for sweets and puddings (*gulab jamus*, for example) call for full-cream powdered milk; most powdered milk on sale is low-fat, or skim milk, which will not work! Full-cream powdered milk is stocked by Indian food stores.

MUSTARD SEEDS. Black mustard seeds, not yellow, should be used in these recipes (in fact they are usually brown in colour). These seeds are pungent but when 'popped' in hot oil become sweet and

The following masala mixture is required for tandoori chicken (see p. 92)

2 tbsp coriander seed
2 tsp sesame seed
1 tsp poppy seed
1 tsp fenugreek seed
1 tsp aniseed
1 tsp cardamom seed
1 tsp caraway seed
2 tsp turmeric
2 tsp cumin seed
2 tsp black mustard seed
½ inch (1.5 cm) cinnamon bark
2 tsp (10 ml) oil
1 tbsp chilli powder
¼ oz (5 g) saffron strands
1 tsp black peppercorns
1 tsp cloves
4–6 neem leaves
1 tsp ground nutmeg
2 tsp salt
asafoetida (piece the size of a black peppercorn)
½ tsp dried coxcomb (red colouring)

1. Heat a heavy frying-pan and roast the seeds and cinnamon bark, taking care that they do not burn. Remove and set aside. Allow the pan to cool down.
2. Heat 2 tsp (10 ml) oil in the pan and fry the chilli powder briefly.
3. Separately, fry each of the other ingredients in the pan.
4. In a coffee grinder, grind the fried spices.
5. Pass the mixture through a medium-coarse sieve to remove any lumps. Place in an airtight jar to use whenever required.

nutty. They are a popular ingredient for all vegetable, fish and prawn dishes.

MUSTARD OIL is used in fish dishes. It is a strong, dark oil extracted from black mustard seeds. This oil has to be heated until it smokes, to remove its bitterness. Mustard oil is available from Indian grocers, and there is no substitute for it.

NEEM leaves are also referred to as curry leaves, or *karavapillai*. These leaves, from the *Murraye koenigii* bush, are widely used as a flavouring, especially in South India. They are sold fresh in some Indian stores here, usually as sprigs 10–12 inches in length, with leaves resembling small bay leaves. Dried leaves are also available in small packets.

OIL. It is best to use a light oil in these recipes – the oil used in Madras is generally groundnut (peanut), which is easily available here. Alternatives are grapeseed oil or safflower. Sunflower oil and olive oil are not suitable. Though frying in ghee is considered a ritual, there are no rituals attached to frying in oil.

OKRA (or ladies' fingers) should be plump and crisp when bought (the tips should snap off easily). The vegetable is gluey when cooked for long, but in these recipes it is cooked quickly and should be eaten straight away, to prevent the stickiness from developing.

ONIONS. The onions used in Madras are usually red onions, sweeter than British cooking onions and quite easily available here now. Some recipes call for shallots, which are much sweeter and richer in flavour, and sometimes these are combined with red onions.

The art of making a good dish lies in how well the onions are sautéed in the beginning – for onions are the essential thickening agent in sauces, and the greater the quantity of well sautéed onions, the thicker a sauce will be. When being sautéed for a spicy sauce onions should be fried before any garlic or ginger are added, to ensure that they soften properly.

PEPPER, BLACK. Black pepper is native to the Malabar coast. It was a very valuable condiment and an important article of trade between Madras and Europe, and was used as a medium of exchange.

PISTACHIOS. In these recipes, pistachios are used for sweets, so unsalted ones should be purchased.

POPPY SEEDS are cultivated in India, and used as a spice. These white or beige seeds are sometimes sold as *kasakasa*, or *khus khus*, and should not be confused with the blue-black variety. (In India, young poppy plants are grown as a pot herb and their leaves sometimes eaten.)

POTATOES are grown all year round in Madras – we have no 'old potatoes' stored for winter. Most potatoes are young, pale golden to a rich yellow, and tend to be similar to the waxy varieties available here. Most recipes that call for potatoes will work best with fairly new potatoes.

RICE, see p. 12

ROSE-WATER. Roses are used in social events, and petals are dried and made into rose-water. This is available in Indian stores and from chemists, and used mainly in sweet dishes. A few drops are sufficient to flavour a dish as it is quite concentrated.

SAFFRON. The purple saffron crocus has been treasured throughout the ages for its golden-coloured pungent stigmas used in flavouring and colouring food. Saffron is the most expensive spice in the world today (not surprisingly, as a pound of saffron requires around 75,000 flowers and intensive labour to produce). Saffron should be used sparingly – just a few strands per dish – as its bitter note may otherwise come to the fore. A dye was distilled from saffron in India in ancient times, and was used by the followers of Buddha for their robes.

SAGO. Small, white, translucent grains which become opaque when cooked. Sago is an ingredient of *payasam*, a favourite sweet dish.

SEMOLINA is derived from wheat. The semolina sold for English recipes is usually very fine – the sweets recipes in this book which use semolina require coarse or very coarse grades, which are available from Indian stores.

SERRATED GOURD has a ridged, rough skin, but is tender inside. This pale green vegetable is available from Indian and Chinese supermarkets. To prepare, peel away the hard, ridged parts of the skin, leaving the softer strips intact.

SESAME SEEDS have been cultivated in Asia since antiquity, for their pearly white seeds that are mild and nutty in flavour. The seeds are often roasted before use, to bring out the flavour – the quickest way to do this is in a heavy pan, without oil. Take care, for once the seeds begin to colour they can burn very easily – keep stirring and have something ready to tip them into once they take on a golden colour.

SPLIT BLACK GRAMS, see DHALL, URAD

SUGAR. A sugar-like substance, jaggery (see above), is often used, though sugar cane is grown in India. White sugar may be used in most dishes, though light muscovado (similar to jaggery) will give sweetmeats a nicer colour.

SWEET POTATOES are available from Indian and Caribbean grocers and from many supermarkets.

TAMARIND. This tree, native to South India, bears lovely yellowish red flowers and is sometime used as an ornamental tree. The fruit of the tree is a buff-coloured pod which has six or eight seeds enclosed in a sweetish acidic brown pulp. Tamarind is used in many Tamilian dishes. An infusion of pulp is made, and the liquid produced is added to the dish during cooking. It has a sweetish yet tangy flavour. Pulp is available in two forms: one rather dry and the other (produced in southeast Asia) is more processed and has less fibre. Weight for weight either sort will give the same results. Hot water is added to the pulp and allowed to stand for 5–10 minutes. Then the pulp is rubbed between the tips of the fingers, or stirred. Tamarind juice is then strained and used when needed.

TOOR DHALL or TOOVAR DHALL, see DHALL

TURMERIC, or *haldi*, is a strong aromatic, has a pepper-like aroma and a bitter, warm taste. It is native to South India, and is obtained from a root related to ginger. Turmeric is used in many dishes – it is also used on ceremonial occasions to rub on the skin and act as a perfume. Turmeric contains a powerful pigment, curcumin, which can be hard to remove when spilled on fabric.

URAD DHALL, see DHALL

VERMICELLI is a type of pasta, resembling very fine spaghetti. Indian vermicelli, like the Italian, is made of durum wheat. The Indian variety is darker in colour and slightly thinner than the Italian one, but both can be used with equal success.

WATER in Madras tends to stand in water pots before use, so is always at room temperature, almost tepid. This is an important factor to bear in mind when preparing chappati dough – when I first moved here I had to learn to heat the water until tepid (neither hot nor cold to the touch) before working my dough.

YOGURT, or CURDS, has been produced in India throughout history, and is now available here in many forms. My recipes call for unsweetened plain yogurt, and some of them (mainly in the Tiffin chapter) specify unset yogurt – this is essential for the success of the recipe (in these recipes water is added so that the yogurt is closer in texture to Indian yogurt).

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Isabel Rani Kingman was born and brought up in Madras, South India. After her college studies in English literature, she moved with her family to southeast Asia, where she met her English husband.

Mrs Kingman now gives adult education classes and demonstrations in Indian cookery in Northumberland, where she lives with her husband and two sons.

Madras – Tamil Nadu – is a land of coconut and tamarind, turmeric and chilli, washed by seas that offer a wealth of fish and seafood. In this book, Rani Kingman has gathered together her favourite family recipes from Madras, where she grew up. These dishes, passed down through the generations, reflect the distinctive ingredients of this part of India.

The author not only shares with us her authentic recipes for the delicious food of her homeland, but tells us something of its rich and ancient culture, and of everyday life and legend.

- **around 130 recipes**
- **superb colour photographs**
- **extensive sections on fish and vegetables**
- **full glossary and index**

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